

BEHOLD THE LORD COMES

By ALOYSIUS CHURCH

MANY good Christians greet the appearance of purple vestments in Advent with cheerless resignation. A sepulchral gloom seems to invade some of our churches during this season, and though the vestments are purple, the feeling is more akin to grey. The explanation is, perhaps, that so many people think of Advent only in terms of an asceticism preparatory to Christmas. Self-denial looms large, but it is out of context and divorced from any consciousness of what is happening in the Church during this season. St. Bernard says that the Church would not celebrate Advent with such solemnity if there did not lie therein some great mystery (*magnum sacramentum*). A mere negative penitential approach to Advent scarcely begins to embrace the riches of the Church's contemplation, and there lingers today amidst the dead bones of Liturgical formality the ghost of a glorious catechesis.

There is only one mystery celebrated by the Church in her Liturgy, the mystery of our redemption. For this reason, the central celebration of the Liturgical year is the celebration of Easter, the celebration of the Paschal mystery, the passage of our Lord from death to life and to glory at the right hand of the Father; a mystery in which we already share by our Baptism. There is a danger that we may separate Christmas and Easter too much. In Dom Bernard Botte's phrase, a double polarity, an elliptical quality has tended to appear, which threatens the unity of the Church's yearly cycle of Feasts. If we do not closely associate Advent and Christmas with Easter we miss what is essential to the Church's prayer. The heart of her celebration is the Paschal mystery, and all other feasts and phases of her yearly cycle have point and purpose only in so far as they reflect some aspect of that central mystery and lead us to a more fruitful share in it. At Christmas, the focus of our thoughts is the Incarnation, but the surrounding light is the mystery of our redemption as a whole. The virtue of the Resurrection presupposes the reality of the Incarnation, and the Liturgy of Christmas sees in the assumption of human nature by the Word of God the beginning of our own assumption into communion of life with the Trinity. It is a Liturgy of hope, of joy, of expectation. It moves forward

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through Advent and Christmas to the Epiphany, which is the feast of the manifestation of Christ as the saviour of all nations. This movement is an image of the passage through life of the individual Christian, as it is of the passage through time of the Church militant, on her way towards the glorious manifestation of her Redeemer at the end of time.

Herein lies the source of the dynamism of Advent and of its prophetic quality. It is the foundation for the hope, the joy, the expectancy in which we educate ourselves during this season. For the work of our redemption, achieved once and for all by our Lord's death and resurrection, has not yet reached its full term in all men. It will be fully accomplished only when our Lord comes again at the last day to enter finally into his Kingdom; and it belongs essentially to the Christian spirit to desire that consummation. Advent is certainly the commemoration of our Lord's first coming. But during this season the Church is anxious that we should respond in faith to the vision of the whole of Redemption. Our movement towards the Lord's full accomplishment is actual and effective in the celebration of our Advent Eucharist; for in the Eucharist the Paschal mystery is again present and operative amongst us. It reaches out to the past, absorbs the present, and builds us up for the future. Nor is it only the sacramental efficacy of the Mass rite as such that speeds on this movement. Through the whole Liturgical structure the Church instructs her children; she illuminates their faith, delivers to them the Word of God as preached in our time, and thus prepares them for more fruitful participation in the sacramental riches of her celebration. So St. Leo writes of the Liturgy of Christmas: 'The voices of the evangelists and the prophets come to our aid. Instructed and moved by them, we remember the birth of our Lord, by which the Word was made flesh, not so much as belonging to the past, but rather as present to us now'.¹

When, in the Epistle of the First Sunday of Advent, the Church cites St. Paul: 'Brethren; already it is high time for us to awake out of our sleep; our salvation is closer to us now than when we first learned to believe',² the appeal is an urgent one, relevant to our time as a living proclamation of the Word of God. To think of it otherwise would be to rob this official act of the Church of its true ministerial significance. Yet in what sense can we of the twentieth century say that our salvation is near? And what sense do we make now of the

¹ Sermo 29, In Nat. Dom. IX, 1,226.

² Rom 13,11.

preaching of John the Baptist, the prophesying of Isaias, the repeated prayer of Advent that our Lord should come? Come how? Come where? The world has already experienced the Incarnation. Christ is already come.

A clue is given in the Gospel of the same first Sunday: 'The sun and the moon and the stars will give portents, and on earth the nations will be in distress . . . And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with full power and majesty. When all this begins, look up, and lift up your heads; it means that the time draws near for your deliverance'.¹ This Gospel clearly refers to the Second Coming of our Lord at the end of time. Further explicit references to the Second Coming, particularly in the Epistles of St. Paul, emphasise the point that the liturgy of this season envisages, at least as one of its principal terms of reference, the final coming of our Lord at the last day. These texts give the season a prophetic quality that sees beyond the present celebration. Even the prophecies of Isaias and the words of John the Baptist are now read to a Christian community that can grasp their fuller significance in the light of Christian revelation. The Messianic era is now inaugurated, the Messiah is come; but his work is not yet done, and his people await the fulfilment of the end of time. On the very eve of Christmas, when the Christian community assembles to wait for the day of the Lord's Nativity, the texts of Midnight Mass convey the sense that this waiting is part of the habitual state of waiting characteristic of the Christian. The collect of the vigil Mass prays that we may see our Lord come as our judge in peace and confidence, even as we now rejoice in his coming as our Redeemer. The collect of the Mass of midnight asks that we who have known on earth the mystery of the Light of the World may come to share in its joys in heaven. We are to 'look forward, blessed in our hope, to the day when there will be a new dawn of glory, the glory of the great God, the glory of our Saviour Jesus Christ'.²

It is important that we should realize that the Liturgy of Advent embraces the dimension of the Second Coming, not only because we cannot otherwise understand the text of our missal, but also because the asceticism of Advent finds there its full inspiration. The memory of Old Testament aspiration is not evoked during this season for the sake of antiquarian interest. There is, it is true, a chronological pattern in our present Liturgy which follows, broadly

¹ Lk. 21,25-7.

² Epistle, Midnight Mass. Tit 2,13.

speaking, the original order of events in the history of our salvation; and according to this pattern, the time of Advent would correspond to the time of Old Testament prophecy and expectation. But this correspondence should not be over-stressed, principally because the liturgical texts themselves do not easily fit into such a pattern. If we try merely to think ourselves back into the days before our Lord's coming, the process is unreal and artificial, and we find that we can share the spirit of the prophets only in a very tenuous way. Even if we could empty ourselves of the effects of two thousand years of sacred history, such a *kenosis* would be out of place. The aspiration of hope and expectation, that was so much a part of Jewish eschatological piety, is now, when voiced in a Christian liturgical context, an expression of Christian hope; and Christian hope is orientated towards the Second Coming. 'The Lord's glory is to be revealed for all mankind to witness'.¹ 'Cry out for happiness, Jerusalem forlorn. See where thy King comes to greet thee, a trusty deliverer'.² 'Take courage and have no fear; see where your Lord is bringing redress for your wrongs, God himself, coming to deliver you'.³ These texts are concerned primarily with the first coming of the Messias. But, they retain their urgency and prophetic import for us, in the light of the second Coming. Their message is relevant to the present condition of the people of God, whose history is in continuity with that of the people of the Old Testament.

The time of Advent is a time of education in Christian hope; and the fruit of this hope is the joy characteristic of those who wait in confidence. On the second Sunday, St. Paul exhorts us: 'May God, the author of our hope, fill you with all joy and peace in your believing; so that you may have hope in abundance, through the power of the Holy Spirit'.⁴ When, on the third Sunday, he cries to us to 'rejoice in the Lord always', he gives us the reason in the phrase that follows: 'for the Lord is near'.⁵ This 'nearness' of the Second Coming is one of the mainsprings of Christian hope and joy. The context of this Pauline exhortation to joy illustrates the eschatological movement of our hope. This letter to the Philippians is particularly appropriate to the season of Advent, for it contains many illustrations of the eschatological aspect of Christianity so dear to the early Christians; one which has faded from Catholic piety. St. Paul was writing

¹ Isai 40,5, Communion, Vigil Mass of Christmas.

² Zech 9,9, Offertory, Ember Saturday.

³ Isai 35,4, Communion, 3rd Sunday of Advent.

⁴ Rom 15,13. ⁵ Phil 4,3.

in prison, fully aware of his own approaching death. Yet his letter communicates a sense of joyful expectancy: '... forgetting what I have left behind, intent on what lies before me, I press on with the goal in view, eager for the prize, God's heavenly summons in Christ Jesus'. He knows that not every Christian has reached the same fullness of expectant joy, yet it is possible for them too: 'All of us who are fully grounded, must be of this mind, and God will make it known to you, if you are of a different mind at present'.¹ It is an attitude to life which distinguishes the Christian from other men, whose 'minds are set on the things of earth; whereas we find our true home in heaven'.² This fullness of hope reaches forward to the end of time, beyond the individual summons, to the last day when Christ will come again; 'It is to heaven that we look expectantly for the coming of our Lord Jesus to save us; he will form this humbled body of ours anew, moulding it into the image of his glorified body'.³

A double danger threatens our celebration of Christmas today. There is the obvious one of commercialisation or secularisation by those not interested in religion. But there is also the danger that the piety of good people should become too superficial or too sentimental, and unrelated to the real issues of their lives. Both these dangers proceed from the same defect: the failure to appreciate Christmas as a celebration of the mystery of our redemption. On the other hand, the joy which the Church steadily inculcates throughout Advent is a religious joy, the fruit of true hope, which involves, in its perfection, a total acceptance of the Christian life, and, in particular, the desire for the Second Coming. We pray for deliverance from the real dangers that threaten us on account of our sins;⁴ for these are the dangers that would separate us from the object of our hope. Hope, like all Christian life, is dynamic, not static. It has its beginnings in our Baptism, when we are taken up, through Christ, into the life of the Trinity. Just as by faith we begin to see God, so by hope we begin to enjoy the possession of God, no matter how imperfectly; and it is the act of hope to desire ever fuller possession of God. But, in our imperfect state, this will always involve some act of dispossession. We have to anticipate the last day by making judgement ourselves on our world, to see what belongs to the light and what to the darkness; progressively to 'abandon the ways of darkness, and put on the armour of light'.⁵ To set our heart on God

¹ Phil 3,13-15.

² Phil 3,19.

³ Phil 3,20-21.

⁴ Collect, 1st Sunday.

⁵ Rom 13,12. Epistle, 1st Sunday.

as our rewarder will always demand a withdrawal of heart from those things that separate us from God. And hence it is that in Advent, alongside the joyful expectation of Christ's coming, there runs the theme of repentance, of change of heart, the exhortation to 'prepare the way of the Lord', and the desire, seen as a favour, that God should 'reveal his ways to us'. It is a false question to ask whether Advent is a time of joy or a time of penance. The two are inseparable. We cannot truly desire to have part with the life of Christ, now risen and glorified, we cannot truly hope for our salvation, unless we do to death whatever influence the effects of sin retain upon our hearts; and this doing to death is one movement towards the fullness of risen life for which we hope.

To share in the liturgical sacramental life of the Church means to allow ourselves to be carried along by hope. Through our sacramental participation, we are 'in step' with the Church as she moves forward, by the power of the Holy Spirit, towards the fulfilment of her hope in Christ. So we pray with her: 'May the cleansing action of this sacrament . . . bring us into union with the mystery of salvation'.¹ We are to be alive to the virtue and efficacy of the present liturgical action, seeing it in the context of the movement of our salvation as a whole. It is traditional to distinguish the coming of our Lord in three ways. The first coming was his historical birth at Bethlehem; the Second Coming will be the final judgement at the last day; and, in between, there is his coming into the hearts of the faithful, especially at Christmas. The liturgy of Christmas moves easily from one to another; sometimes, indeed, embracing all three with that density and compenetration of vision to be found so frequently in sacred writing. This is the way of sacred expression – to present us with mystery, and, by the very avoidance of analysis, to invite prayerful contemplation and participation. All three dimensions are, for example, embraced by this Postcommunion prayer: 'Grant, O Lord, that the birth of thy Son, which we now remember, may give us new life; refreshed as we are by his sacrament which comes to us from heaven'.² The dynamic inter-relation of the past, present, and future coming of our Lord springs from the transcendence of the supernatural; and it is part of our asceticism in Advent to become attuned to that transcendence. Our faith and hope enable us to reach out beyond the limitations of space and time. For it is the eternal and infinite God who has worked these wonders

¹ Postcommunion, Ember Friday.

² Vigil of Christmas.

in human history; and our participation in the liturgy brings us into contact with this same supernatural power now active and effective in present time. The Church's piety in Advent is directed not only towards the end of time, but also towards the immediate future. In the liturgy of Christmas all three phases of our Lord's coming are to have their special effect on us. Our celebration of Advent and Christmas is a vital participation in the working out of the salvation of the world, begun in the Incarnation in the past, and to be completed definitively in the Second Coming in the future.

And so we remember our Lord's birth at Christmas 'not so much as belonging to the past, but rather as present to us now'. Our remembering is not simply the natural exercise of memory. We effectively take part in the events we remember. The incidents in our Lord's life are not like any other historical incidents; their supernatural effects continue to have influence on our lives. The memory of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord at Mass, is, evidently, a unique sacramental commemoration; yet at Christmas we 'remember' our Lord's Nativity at Midnight Mass. Our remembering his Nativity is intimately connected with our remembering the whole Paschal mystery. The aspiration of our hope in Advent is that, through our remembering the Incarnation and our association with Christ in that mystery, we may be more closely associated with him in his death and resurrection. We pray that through our death to sin and our resurrection to the life of grace, we may ultimately come to share his glory for all eternity. This is the hope and the joy of our preparation for Christmas. We know where we are going, and we know that through the Incarnation our human nature has been elevated to a share in the Divine nature. This mystery is daily commemorated at Mass when, at the Offertory, the drop of water is mixed with wine, symbolising the union of the human with the divine; and the prayer, *Deus qui humanae substantiae*, expresses it perfectly. These gifts are integrated, subsequently, into the memorial of the Passion, Death and Resurrection; and so we are reminded that the Incarnation and the whole Paschal mystery are in dynamic unity.

There is, then, a real 'coming' at Christmas to which we look forward. The history of salvation is such that the Paschal mystery is achieved in each age, within each Christian community, in successive stages. All is not given at once; for, under the ordinary dispensation of grace, the limitations of human nature in its present condition demand a gradual process of growth. Along the course of

human history, Christ works for the building up of his Kingdom: 'there is one in your midst whom you know not'.¹ He has promised the help of his presence when the Christian community is assembled in unity to remember him 'until he comes'.² Within the action of the Eucharist, he comes in a special way, according to the needs of successive generations. In that rite, instituted by himself, he gives in the real presence of his risen body an earnest, a promise and a sign that he will come again; and at the same time he ministers to the needs of the present. We are called upon to prepare throughout Advent to celebrate the Eucharist at Christmas in the spirit of the early Christians, for whom every Sunday Eucharist was a joyous anticipation of the Second Coming. At the same time, we should retain a sense of the real efficacy of the celebration, as the history of our salvation moves towards its glorious consummation. To ensure our more fruitful participation, the liturgical text provides stimulus and inspiration. 'Everything that is written is written for our instruction':³ the word of God proclaimed in our time through the ministry of the Church. There are indications that the order and structure of the Advent texts are specially designed to communicate the sense of progress towards the manifestation of God in the mystery of the Incarnation. We cannot, however, press analysis too far, since the Liturgy has its own dialectic, and achieves heightened effect more by the repetition and juxtaposition of themes than by strictly logical arrangement.

Regem venturum dominum, venite adoremus. 'Come let us adore our King and Lord whose coming approaches'. So we begin the Divine Office during the first two weeks of Advent. The formula of this 'invitation' is changed as Christmas approaches, and the eschatological import of the mystery made more explicit in the last two weeks, when we sing: *Prope est Dominus, venite adoremus.* 'The Lord is near: come let us adore him'. The phrase, 'the Lord is near', is charged with overtones of the Second Coming. On the Vigil of Christmas itself, we seem to be already within reach of the Parousia: *Hodie scietis quia veniet dominus et mane videbitis gloriam eius.* 'Today you shall know that the Lord will come, and tomorrow you shall see his glory'.⁴ 'Today you shall know that the Lord will come' suggests that the coming at Christmas is a sign and a promise that he will come again. Yet the mood changes on Christmas Day, and the Church relaxes

¹ Jn 1,26. Gospel, 3rd Sunday.

² Rom 15,4. Epistle, 2nd Sunday.

³ 1 Cor 11,26.

⁴ Introit.

in the calm contemplation of her Saviour's birth, mysteriously present: *Christus natus est nobis, venite adoremus*. 'Christ is born for us, come let us adore him'.

Similarly, during the nine days before Christmas, the special series of O Antiphons to the *Magnificat* at Vespers, and the special antiphons for Lauds and the Little Hours, heighten the sense of expectation. They speak with special urgency, as though the Incarnation were now imminent for the first time: 'Do not be afraid, our Lord will come to you on the fifth day'.¹

After the general apocalyptic warning of the First Sunday, the focus in the Gospels is on John the Baptist, or rather on the significance of his mission. The decisive time is at hand: 'the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean'.² These are the portents which, as the prophet Isaias had foretold, would be signs that the Messianic era had arrived. John is more than an ordinary prophet. Indeed, he is the last and greatest of the prophets, for it is his task to prepare for the immediate visitation of the Son of God. 'This is the man of whom it is written, Behold, I am sending before thy face that angel of mine, who is to prepare the way for thy coming'.³ John still preaches his mission, but now no longer along the banks of the Jordan. His pulpit is the churches of our age; his audience, the Christian community, as they prepare to celebrate the coming of their Lord in the Eucharist. It remains his task to 'prepare the way for thy coming'.

In the Gospel of the third Sunday, John diverts attention from himself, re-directing the thoughts of those who seek God to their true object: 'he that shall come after me is preferred before me; because he was born before me'.⁴ This verse is pregnant with the whole mystery of the Divinity. It should be read in the light of the whole of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, a large section of which appears in the Gospels of the Christmas cycle.⁵ The phrase is repeated three times in this chapter,⁶ each time its import being revealed more fully, as is the Evangelist's manner. It can be understood in the context of the opening passage of his Gospel where our Lord's divinity is fully stated: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. The Chapter comes to a climax in the concluding verse, where the full redemptive

¹ Antiphon to the *Benedictus*, Lauds, 21st December.

² Mt 11,5. Gospel, 2nd Sunday. Cf. Isai 35,5.

³ Mt 11,10. Gospel, 2nd Sunday.

⁴ Jn 1,15.

⁵ 3rd Sunday, 3rd Mass Christmas Day, Octave of the Epiphany.

⁶ Jn 1,15; 1,27; 1,30.

significance of the Incarnation is expressed. There, our Lord identifies himself with the ladder of Jacob's vision; uniting, again, his temporal mission with its future consummation: 'You will see heaven opening, and the Angels of God going up and coming down upon the Son of Man'.¹ In the Eucharist, the heavens open and we see the Word of God coming to meet us: 'O Divine Word of God, who goes forth from the bosom of the Father and, born into the world, comes to its aid throughout the course of time'.² Through John's preaching we prepare to meet him as he comes. John the Baptist turns our hearts from the crackers and tinsel the world would have us purchase to our cost. He 'lays the axe to the root',³ and, more subtly, turns our appetite from any spurious religious sentimentality. John the Baptist, the prophet, the man of the desert, urges us today to taste and savour the coming into time of the eternal Word of God.

This coming is also expressed in terms of the Easter theme of Light. From St. Paul's 'the night is far on its course; the day draws near'⁴ of the first Sunday, to St. John's 'we have seen his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father',⁵ on Christmas Day, the theme of an approaching light and revelation illumines the pages of Advent. It builds up the sense of prophetic expectation, and comes to its full term in the celebration of the Epiphany: 'Rise up, Jerusalem, and shine forth; thy dawn has come, and the glory of the Lord has broken upon thee. Darkness may envelop the earth, and all the nations lie in gloom; but upon thee the Lord shall dawn, over thee his splendour shall be revealed'.⁶ Already in Advent we have similar prophecies: 'Out of Sion, in perfect beauty God comes revealed'.⁷ 'Rouse thee, Jerusalem, take thy stand on the heights, and see the joy thy God is sending thee'.⁸ 'See where the Lord comes, with all his saints about him; glorious the light that day will bring'.⁹ 'The glory of the Lord shall be revealed; and all mankind shall see the salvation of our God'.¹⁰ The Incarnation is the manifestation of God in Christ, and through Advent we are led forward, from out of our darkness, to the fuller manifestation of Christ in our time. Advent is a waiting and a preparation of the liturgical manifestation of Christmas and Epiphany, which is an anticipation of his final manifestation at the

¹ Jn 1,51. * Advent hymn for Matins. * Mt 3,10. * Rom 13,12.

² Jn 1,14. 3rd Mass, on Christmas Day. * Isai 60,1-6. Epistle.

³ Ps 49,2-3. Gradual, 2nd Sunday. * Bar 5,5; 4,36. Communion, 2nd Sunday.

⁴ Zech 14,55-6. Communion, Ember Friday.

¹⁰ Isai 40,5. Communion, Vigil of Christmas.

end of time. The light of this revelation is not to be understood of the light of faith only. It is light in the Johannine sense, a participation in the life of God. Our Lord said 'who sees me, sees the Father',¹ yet to see the Father is the ultimate goal of human life. To possess this light is to possess its source; to see his glory is to share his Divinity.² Hence, in Advent, the repetition of the prophetic exclamation, *Ecce*: 'Behold', the exclamation of one who sees marvels. The events that precede the coming of Christ are seen as first glimpses of the revelation that is to come: 'Behold, a Virgin shall conceive',³ 'Behold, thy cousin Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age',⁴ 'Behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leapt for joy'.⁵ Similarly St. John the Baptist is to recognize the identity of our Lord from the signs that attend his work: 'Go and tell John what your own eyes and ears have witnessed; how the blind see, and the lame walk, how the lepers are made clean, and the deaf hear, how the dead are raised to life, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them'.⁶ St. Joseph is to have no fear, when minded to send our Lady away in secret, for the Angel tells him that this conception is a work of God: 'It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that she has conceived this child'.⁷ These are the marvellous works of God, outpourings of the power of the Holy Ghost, which herald the appearance of God on earth. John the Baptist completes his testimony with the words: 'Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sin of the world . . . And I saw; and I gave testimony that this is the Son of God'.⁸ This is he of whom another introit sings: 'I saw one sitting on a high throne, worshipped by a throng of angels singing in unison: this is he whose kingdom shall be eternally renowned'.⁹ The light of this revelation approaches us now, as we move forward through the years, to the dawn of his Second Coming. The Advent and Christmas readings deliver to us the prophecy, and our presence at the assembly of the Christian community is a guarantee that our expectation is fully grounded. We are invited to look and see these marvellous things the Lord has done, for their recitation feeds and strengthens our confidence in the power of God. We pray in Advent that our celebration of Christmas may be the occasion of growth towards the

¹ Jn 14,9.² Jn 1,14-18.³ Isai 7,14. 2nd Lesson, Ember Wednesday.⁴ Lk 1,36. Gospel, Ember Wednesday.⁵ Lk 1,44. Gospel, Ember Saturday.⁶ Mt 11,5-6. Gospel, 2nd Sunday.⁷ Mt 1,20. Gospel, Vigil of Christmas.⁸ Jn 1,29,34. Gospel, Feast of Our Lord's Baptism.⁹ Introit, Sunday after the Epiphany.

fullness of this light: 'Light up the darkness of our minds through the graces of thy visitation'.¹ But just as the possession of this light is the same thing as the possession of God, so the condition of its possession is the full living of the Christian life. We pray, then, for insight into the ways of God, we pray to be shown the ways that lead to light: 'Teach us to despise earthly things and to love what is of heaven'.² This teaching is a living communication; one which imparts more than intellectual knowledge. The light we seek, the object of our hope, is to know in a concrete manner the ways by which he comes. We seek a living experience of the law of God in our lives.

The Eucharist gives us this light in ever greater abundance. Our ways may trace as yet imperfectly the pattern of God's ways, but we are in process of transformation, and the 'great mystery' of our liturgical celebration is that in it this transformation is actually accomplished. The Kingdom of God is not outside and beyond the day-to-day lives of his chosen people. It is established amongst us. And when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist during Advent, the life of each one is gathered into the marvel of his coming: 'Behold the Lord comes, with all his saints about him: glorious the light that day will bring'.³ We are now identified with his coming: 'Your life is hidden away now with Christ in God. Christ is your life, and when he is made manifest, you too will be made manifest in glory with him'.⁴ The Secret prayer of the Midnight Mass relates this theme to the action of the Eucharist: 'Accept, Lord, this day's festal offering, and in thy gracious bounty grant that through this sacred interchange of gifts, the likeness of Christ may one day be revealed in us; for in him our human nature is already made one with thine'. Through the Liturgy God's step is quickened. In Advent we pray that when he finally comes, we shall have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts prepared. In our Eucharist, he promises that it will be so.

¹ Collect, 3rd Sunday.

² Postcommunion, 2nd Sunday.

³ Zech 14,5-6. Communion, Ember Friday.

⁴ Col 3,1-4.