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Entering Advent

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by ENZO BIANCHI

Truly, Advent brings us to the heart of the Christian mystery: the coming of the Lord at the end of time. The Christian is he who remains vigilant every day and every hour, in the knowledge that the Lord is coming

We are entering Advent, a time of remembrance, of invocation, and of expectancy of the Lord's coming. In our profession of faith we confess: "He was made man, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died and was buried, descended into hell, the third day arose according to the Scriptures, and will come in glory to judge the living and the dead."

The Lord's coming is an integral part of the Christian mystery because the day of the Lord has been announced by all the prophets, and Jesus on several occasions spoke of his coming in glory as Son of Man to put an end to the world and to inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth. All creation groans and suffers as if in labor awaiting its transfiguration and the manifestation of God's children (cf. Rom 8:19ff): the Lord's coming will be the answer to this supplication, to this invocation, which in turn is a response to the Lord's promise ("I will come quickly!", Rev 22:20) and which unites itself to the voices of all who throughout history have suffered injustice and violence, lack of recognition and oppression, and have lived as poor, grieving, peaceful, defenseless, hungry. Conscious of the fulfillment of time already in Christ, the Church gives voice to the expectation and during Advent repeats with greater force and assiduity the ancient invocation of Christians: Marana thà! Come, Lord! St Basil could thus answer the question "Who is a Christian?": "The Christian is he who remains vigilant every day and every hour, in the knowledge that the Lord is coming."

But we have to ask: today, do Christians still and with conviction await the Lord's coming? This is a question that the Church must ask herself, because she is defined by what she awaits and hopes for, and also because today there is really a plot of silence concerning this event put before us by Jesus as justice, first of all merciful justice, but capable as well of revealing the justice and the truth of each one, as encounter with the Lord in glory, as Kingdom at last fulfilled in eternity. Often it seems as if Christians read time in worldly fashion, as an *eternum continuum*, as homogenous time, without surprises and essential novelties, an evil infinity, an eternal present in which many things can happen, but not the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!

For many Christians has not Advent become a simple preparation for Christmas, almost as if we were still awaiting the coming of Jesus in the flesh of our humanity and in the poverty of Bethlehem? — a naive devout regression that impoverishes Christian hope! In truth, the Christian is conscious that if there is no coming of the Lord in glory, then he is to be pitied more than all the miserable of the earth (cf. 1 Cor 15:19, on faith in the resurrection), and if there is no future characterized by the *novum* that the Lord can establish, then the following of Jesus in the historic today becomes untenable. A time without direction and orientation — what sense can it have and what hopes can it open?

Advent, therefore, for the Christian is a season of significance, because in it ecclesially, that is, in a common undertaking, we are exercised in awaiting the Lord, in the vision of faith of invisible realities (cf. 2 Cor 4:18), in renewal of hope of the

Kingdom with the conviction that today we walk through faith and not through vision (cf. 2 Cor 5:6–7) and that salvation is not yet experienced as life no longer threatened by death, by sickness, by sorrow, by sin. There is a salvation brought by Christ that we know in the remission of sins, but full salvation — ours, of all men, and of the whole universe — is not yet come.

On account also of this the Christian's expectancy should be a way of communion with the expectation of the Jews, who like us believe in the "day of the Lord," in the "day of liberation," that is, in the "day of the Messiah."

Truly, Advent brings us to the heart of the Christian mystery: the coming of the Lord at the end of time is, in fact, only the eschatological extension and fullness of the energies of Christ's resurrection.

In these days of Advent we should therefore ask ourselves: do not we Christians behave perhaps as if God had remained behind us, as if we found God only in the child born in Bethlehem? Do we know to seek God in our future with the urgency of Christ's coming in our hearts, like sentinels impatient for the dawn? We must allow ourselves to be interpellated by the cry, more than ever relevant, of Teilhard de Chardin: "Christians, charged with keeping ever alive the burning flame of desire, what have we done with awaiting the Lord?"