

Look at the Time!

We live in a society where looking at the time is everywhere before our eyes and where hearing the time resonates with our ear drums. From microwaves and watches that buzz and beep, to computers, clocks, and hand helds that are always announcing “Look at the time!”

I heard on the CBC the other day that we have methods of time keeping that are so precise that clocks are being devised that will keep such accurate time so that a million years from now, they will only be one second off mean Greenwich Time.

We can measure time down to the millisecond, something key to many Olympic events like the hundred metre sprint and swimming races. In championship contests be they football, basketball or hockey the ardent sports fan has one eye on the clock and the other on the game when the score is close and there are only seconds left.

And then there is that clock that always seems to be five minutes ahead of me, leaving me rehearsing with the rabbit from Alice in Wonderland that memorable line “I’m late, I’m late for a very important date!”

Well this is Advent Sunday. Advent is also a season when the Church Announces “Look at the Time” This is the announcement Paul proclaims in the reading from Romans. At verse 11 St. Paul writes: “But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God.”

Here is an important warning. We can be so busy attending to the time that our day to day obligations demand of us that we lose track of God and become oblivious to him. It is because of this tendency that we set aside the time to come together this morning to worship him through song, teaching, prayer and sacrament.

The Collect for Advent Sunday helps us to understand the time in which we are living.

We 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 your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and ever. Amen.

- Let us first observe that this Collect is based in part upon the appointed Epistle for the first Sunday of the Christian Year, *Romans 13:8-14*, and, particularly, one verse therein. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light" (verse 12). Here "the day" is that of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to earth, to judge the living and the dead. Christians are to be spiritually and morally prepared for this unique Event, with which their salvation is inextricably tied.
- Secondly, let us note how carefully and attractively Cranmer has combined in this prayer the retrospect of the First Advent with the anticipation of the Second Advent and how judiciously he has placed each in high relief by its vivid contrast with the other. "Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility," & "He shall come again in his glorious Majesty to judge the living and the dead."
- In the third place, let us observe the skilful use of Scriptural antitheses, which is pleasing to the ear and moving to the mind -- "Cast away" & "put on"; "works of darkness" & "armour of light"; "in the time of this mortal life" & "in the last day"; "this mortal life" & "the life immortal"; "to visit us" & "to judge the living and the dead"; "in great humility" & "in his glorious majesty".
- 1. Fourthly, let us note that although it is a Prayer, it also is an expression of faith and is a kind of miniature Creed. Here we have the divine Sonship of Christ, His birth into the world and implicitly his sufferings and death too (for were not they the climax of his humiliation?); his Return from the right hand of God the Father (inferring his previous Resurrection and ascension); his judgment of the living and the dead at his Second Advent; and finally the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Now let us analyse the Collect according to the usual Structure of the Collects as used in the Medieval Church. It begins with "(i) an introductory address and commemoration, on which is based (ii) a single central prayer: from this in turn (iii) other clauses of petition or desire are developed, and (iv) the whole concludes with some fixed form of ending" the last usually being, if the prayer is addressed to the Father, a variant on per Iesum Christum dominum nostrum sometimes followed by a doxology.

1. Introductory Address. God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is addressed as the Almighty God, the Deity who has dominion and authority over all the created order and through space and time.

2. Central prayer request. We ask for grace to be given unto us so that in this mortal life, to which the Son of God came in great humility in his Incarnation to save us, we may cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

3. More petition and desire. We ask that at the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, when the dead are raised, and the living and the dead are judged, we shall rise to immortal life in glorious resurrection bodies to enjoy the beatific vision and heavenly service.

4. An appropriate Ending or Termination. We make our petitions through the same Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Mediator between God the Father and mankind and who, as the Incarnate Son, lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one Deity, now and for ever.

In the praying of this Collect daily this Advent, we shall surely know the blessing of the Lord upon us as he delights to hear from us. And we will better know the time.