



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Sunday Next Before Advent – November 21, 2021

“Behold the Lamb of God!”

St. John 1:36b (KJV)

Tess, a precocious eight-year-old, heard her Mom and Dad talking about her little brother, Andrew. All Tess knew was that Andrew was very sick and her family was completely out of money. They were moving to an apartment complex next month because Daddy didn't have the money to pay for both the doctor's bills and their house. A very costly surgery was needed to save Andrew and it was looking like there was no one to loan them the money. Tess heard her Daddy say to her tearful Mother with whispered desperation:

“Only a miracle can save him now.”

Tess went to her bedroom and pulled a glass jelly jar from its hiding place in the closet. She poured all the change out on the floor and counted it carefully three times – the total had to be exactly perfect, there was no chance here for mistakes. Quietly placing the coins back in the jar and twisting the cap, Tess slipped out the back door and made her way six blocks to the local drug store.

She waited patiently for the pharmacist to give her some attention, but he was too busy at the moment. Tess twisted her feet to make a

scuffling noise – nothing. Next, Tess cleared her throat with the most disgusting sound she could muster – no good. Finally, Tess took a quarter from her jar and banged it on the glass counter – THAT did it!

“And what do YOU want?”

the pharmacist asked in an annoyed tone of voice,

“Can't you see I'm talking to my brother from Chicago whom I haven't seen in ages?”

he added without waiting for a reply to his question.

“Well I want to talk to you about MY brother,”

Tess answered back in the same annoyed tone,

“He's really, really sick and I want to buy a miracle!”

“I beg your pardon?”

asked the astonished pharmacist.

“His name is Andrew, and he has something bad growing inside his head and my Daddy says only a miracle can save him now. So, how much does a miracle cost?”

“We don't sell miracles here, little girl – I'm sorry, but I can't help you,”

the pharmacist said, softening a little.

“Listen,”

Tess continued undeterred,

"I have the money to pay for it. If it isn't enough, I will get the rest. Just tell me how much a miracle costs."

The pharmacist's brother was a well-dressed man who, up to now, had been listening quietly to the conversation. He stooped down and asked the little girl:

"What kind of a miracle does your brother need?"

"I don't know,"

Tess replied with her eyes welling up,

"I just know Andrew's really sick and Mommy says he needs an operation, but my Daddy can't pay for it - so, I want to use my money."

"And how much do you have?"

asked the well-dressed man from Chicago.

"One dollar and eleven cents,"

Tess answered barely audibly,

"It's all the money I have, but I can get some more if I need to."

"Well, what a coincidence,"

smiled the man,

"One dollar and eleven cents is the exact price of a miracle for little brothers!"

The man took the money in one hand and with the other hand he

grasped Tess's mitten and said:

"Take me to where you live. I want to see your brother and meet your parents. Let's see if I have the kind of miracle you need."

The well-dressed man from Chicago turned out to be Dr. Carlton Armstrong, a surgeon specializing in neurosurgery. He performed the operation – without charge – and it wasn't long until Andrew was home again and doing well.

One day, not long afterward, Tess's Mom and Dad were happily talking about the inexplicable chain of events.

"That surgery,"

Tess's Mom whispered,

"Was a real miracle. I wonder how much it would have cost?"

Tess smiled. She knew exactly how much a miracle costs – one dollar and eleven cents, plus the faith of a little child.



Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to have such child-like faith:



faith that always trusts – and never wavers,



faith that isn't afraid to believe in – and earnestly seek – miracles.

We become so consumed with the cares of our everyday lives that we often miss the miracles that occur all around us on a daily basis.

So, I must ask – has it been a while since we marvelled at:



The changing of the seasons?



The sun rising in the morning – EVERY morning – and setting in a blaze of iridescence every evening?



How about the wonder of children’s laughter?



What about our own bodies perfectly suited to face life’s demands? (Indeed, as the Psalmist writes in 139:14a: “...I am fearfully and wonderfully made...”.)



What about the miracle of life itself?



Or the “Miracle of Miracles” – that Almighty God would love us so much that He would lower Himself to become human, so that we might, someday, become like Him?



(And just what was the cost of this “Miracle of Miracles”, anyway?)



In another place, in another time, another brother named Andrew received healing as he first witnessed the miraculous “Lamb of God,”

for Andrew knew – instantly – that he saw in Jesus of Nazareth God’s long-promised Messiah.

In response, Andrew’s first act was to bring his big brother Simon to meet Jesus. And Jesus, we are told, “beheld” (that is, Jesus regarded, observed, or considered) Simon and then renamed him “Peter” (that is, “The Rock”), thereby changing Peter’s life forever, from that moment on. As we read in today’s Gospel Lesson (St. John 1:42):

“And (Andrew) brought (Simon) to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, ‘Thou art Simon the son of Jonah: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.’”



Jesus of Nazareth, the life-changing “Lamb of God.”

The prophet Jeremiah miraculously prophesied about Jesus **more than 600 years before His birth** referring to Him (in 23:6d of today’s Lesson from the Old Testament book that bears his name) as:

“... The Lord our Righteousness...”

In fact, Jeremiah’s name for Jesus God’s long-promised Messiah:



“The Lord our Righteousness”,

sums up the entire season of Trinity and turns us toward “Advent” (from the Latin word “Adventus” which means “coming” – the coming of Jesus Christ, not only as a baby at Christmas, but also as Judge at His Second Coming at the Last Day).

But until then, while we struggle day-by-day through our earthly journeys, the Nazarene carpenter still miraculously changes lives. For when we first look to Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we become part of Him and He of us.



Jesus literally clothes us in His righteousness.

His righteousness becomes ours and we are made right in the eyes of His (and our) heavenly Father.

Likewise, as we live our lives with Jesus Christ at the controls, we become more and more like Him.



His righteousness actually GROWS in us.

This growth in righteousness is what we have sought during Trinity season - through the practice of Christian virtue - by following daily the teaching and the example of Jesus. Furthermore, through the nourishing grace of His Holy Spirit, we have endeavoured to grow up in the Righteous Branch and, in so doing, as today's Collect states:

"...plenteously bring forth the fruit of good works,"

Jesus Christ, "The Lord our Righteousness," also confronts us with the cost of this miracle we have from God. For, in order to make us righteous, Jesus Himself - **righteousness personified** - had to bear our unrighteousness on the cross and accept His Father's judgement for all our sins:



DEATH.



“The Christ must die; for behold, He is ‘The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.’”

So, John the Baptist, “The Advent prophet” proclaims (in 1:29b & 36b of today’s Gospel Lesson from St. John the Divine).

The miraculous sacrifice made for us by Jesus:



even the miracle of His eternal love for each one of us,

is the beginning of all the goodness we have – just as the miracle of Jesus’ perfect life is the ideal example we seek to emulate in this life.

Moreover, Jesus miraculously comes a second, and final, time to be our merciful Judge because He has first come in great humility to be our Saviour.

Advent begins in our longing for “Christ-like righteousness” and so we start today, by petitioning God to “stir up” our wills. But Advent also foretells Jesus’ humiliation as He miraculously came to die for our sins.

Ultimately, however, Advent – in the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – proceeds to His final, yet just, judgement of both “the quick and the dead” (those who are alive when Jesus returns, as well as those who have already physically died), in which, according to Revelation 20:15, all unrighteousness is consumed:

“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life is cast into the lake of fire.”

While those who are in Jesus Christ (those who are clothed by His righteousness alone), through His undying:



love,



mercy, and



grace

will arrive home to dwell with God in heaven – forever.



This day then, this “Sunday Next Before Advent,” this “Stir-Up Sunday,” as we look forward to a new Church Year, let us, as true Christians, renew our faith in Jesus Christ and in His ability to work a miracle in our lives – both our brief life here on earth and our eternal one in heaven. Remembering that a miracle is not the suspension of natural law, but, rather:



the operation of a higher law.

And that, like eight-year-old Tess, Jesus gave everything He had to make it happen.



Dearest Reader in Christ:

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