

THE COIN OF THE REALM

A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent, 2010

On the Text: Propers for the Day

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There is an old phrase that used to be used a lot to indicate what sort of thing was used as money in a particular country: the coin of the realm. If you read about the history of money, you find out that for thousands of years, there was no such thing as money. The only way one person got something from another, if he didn't steal it, was by barter: trading him something he wanted (or would take) for the something the first person wanted, as in a Tom Sawyer type trade of "I'll trade you this bull frog for that pocketknife with the broken blade." In a society based on barter, in which most people were nomads, there wasn't really any way to get to be really rich, because somehow the rich guy would have to be able to carry all the stuff he had accumulated from one place to another.

When man discovered that certain rocks put in a fire gave forth metals, things changed, At the earliest, just lumps of metal were used in trading, first, gold, silver and copper. Later, bronze and then iron became things of value, but it wasn't until around 700 BC that the Lydians in the western end of Asia Minor around Ephesus and Sardis were the first to make coins. By the time of Jesus, the use of coins as a money had spread all over the Middle East and around the Mediterranean and up to the British Isles. Each country that was not a slave state to some other country tended to develop its own coinage – the coin of the realm. The Greeks had the *drachma*; the Romans, the *denarius*; and in the time of Darius, the Persians had the *Daric*, which he modestly named after himself. We do that too. I have heard people call a five dollar bill a Lincoln. The Jews, who were often conquered by others because of their failures to follow God's laws, had all of these coins and some others as the coins of the realms in which they were subjects. However, there was no paper money in Biblical times. The first Paper money we know of seems to have been first issued in China around 960 AD. That turns out to have been the beginning of many economic problems. A silver denarius in Jesus' time had an intrinsic value, the value of the silver in it. Economists call that sort of money, commodity money, because the face value of it is the value of the metal in it as a commodity. Paper money simply represents a promise by somebody, a bank or a government, to pay in a value equal to some commodity, so paper money is called *representative* or symbolic money. Aside from that promise, the paper has little or no intrinsic value. Well, you could use it to start a fire. But then there is another realm. We often speak of the heavenly realm of God. It is not unrealistic or out of character for materialistic man to ask if there might be a coin of that realm. That is a question I'll come back to in a bit. Before we do that, let's look at the Propers for today.

Today is another one of those Sundays that has an informal name that comes from the Collect and from the Bible readings. The second Sunday in Advent is often called Bible Sunday or Scripture Sunday. When you hear the Collect for today, the reason for that name is obvious. Today's Collect is on page 92 in your Prayer Book, and says this: **Blessed Lord, who hast caused**

all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

This idea of the great value of the Scriptures is picked up in the Epistle lesson, where, in the first verse of the Epistle lesson, St. Paul says, Romans 15:4 **4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.** This verse is preceded by another that refers to the Scriptures: Romans 15:3 **3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.** St. Paul here is making a slight paraphrase of the 9th verse of Psalm 69, which says: Psalm 69:9 **9 For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.** What David meant when he wrote this Psalm was that all of the reproaches and nasty things that were said to God's people because of their obedience to God are really directed against God himself. In Matthew 5, Jesus tells us that if we suffer because we believe in Him we are blessed: Matthew 5:11-12 **11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.** This is also what St. Paul means: that reproaches in opposition to Jesus are also in opposition to God the Father. St. Peter confirms this in 1 Peter 3:14, where he says: **14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;** The word used by St. Peter for happy is the same as what Jesus used that is translated as *blessed*.

That verse that preceded our lesson has the phrase, "it is written" in it. In the Bible this is always a signal that Holy Scripture is being talked about. We see Scripture referring to Scripture. Now, we know that the OT is the Scripture Jesus referred to in the many times he said, "Have you not read ..." or "It is written,..." How do we know that the NT is Scripture too? In 2 Peter 3:15-16, St. Peter says, **15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.,** St Peter implies that the writings of St. Paul are to be considered to be Scripture.

If we were having Morning Prayer this morning rather than a service of Holy Communion, we would hear as Second Lesson the entire third chapter of St. Paul's Second Epistle to St. Timothy, which, we now know is itself Scripture. The last four verses of that chapter say this: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 **14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be**

competent, equipped for every good work. This is another reason to call this Bible Sunday. Look at what it says, “you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Sacred writings – Scripture – is our source for knowledge and wisdom about God and Jesus Christ. At this point in time, we really have no other source, unless you consider preaching to be such a source. The problem with that is that the preacher had to get his knowledge of God and Jesus Christ from somewhere, and that somewhere has to have been the Bible if his preaching is to be true to God and Jesus Christ.

Just as a side question, how do we know the Bible is authentic, that it is what it says it is? Do you believe there was a guy named Homer who wrote two stories called the Iliad and the Odyssey? Or two philosophers called Plato and Aristotle? In Halley’s Bible Handbook, we are told that there are about 4000 manuscripts of all or parts of the bible that date from the Second century AD (that’s the 100s) up to the 1400s, but the first complete Ms of Homer dates after 1300. I have read elsewhere that there were only three partial Mss of Homer earlier than that. Everybody believes Homer existed about 800 to 700 BC, and Plato and Aristotle, who don’t have very many Mss existing either. No, the evidence is on the side of Jesus. I wonder why so many don’t believe in Him. I guess 4000 manuscripts are not enough.

We have the scripture before us. Let’s look at the rest of today’s Propers.

The Gospel lesson is the one with the most specific Advent lesson, because it contains Jesus’ Prophecy of His Second Coming. One of the things that is very important in Advent is to recognize the necessity to prepare ourselves for that Second Coming, because Jesus told us in Mark 13:32 **32 But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.** There are some who think that Jesus’ Prophecy in this lesson refers to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, because he was definitely talking about that event in the verses immediately preceding our lesson. The majority opinion of most scholars is that Jesus shifts gears in the middle of that speech, which is called the Olivet Discourse because he spoke that to the Disciples on the Mount of Olives, that He went from one prophecy right to another. So our primary Advent lesson for today is in the Gospel lesson: Prepare for Christ’s Second Coming, the one that will be the Last Advent.

The Psalm and the OT lesson are more closely related to the theme of the importance of Scripture. but there is a third theme, or thread, that runs through all the Propers today that is not immediately obvious. In the Psalm, we have in verses 3 and 4, a prayer that the psalmist be educated: Psalm 25:4-5 **4 Show me thy ways, O LORD; and teach me thy paths. 5 Lead me forth in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; in thee hath been my hope all the day long.** This teaching can now come to us only through the reading and hearing of Scripture, but in the OT lesson, we have much spiritual meat to feed our souls.

Take a pew Bible or your own and turn with me to Isaiah 55. Look at the first two verses. You may not think they make sense; but to a Christian, they make wonderful sense: Isaiah 55:1-2 KJV Isaiah 55:1 **Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for**

that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

I think this is one of the passages that Jesus had to reveal to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, He gives the living water that quenches all thirst forever. Yes, come buy and eat, without money from Jesus because he is Bread of Life. And what do we spend our money on that is not bread, on things that do not satisfy – the things of the world.

To hearken unto God and eat that which is good, the things that are good and satisfy the soul, requires money of a different kind, not silver and gold, and certainly not paper with worthless promises. No, it requires soul money, God's money, the coin of God's heavenly realm.

What do we have that is of value to God, He who says, Isaiah 55:8-9 **8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.** What is it that God wants from us? Our **Faith**, the faith we show forth in praise and thanksgiving and in obeying His commandments. He wants us to hear and read his Holy Word as He says verses 3 and 11 of this OT lesson: Isaiah 55:3 **3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;** But we have to respond to His word as he says in verse 11: Isaiah 55:11 **11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.**

It was His Word that went forth to give us the gift of Faith in the first place. All He wants from us is to return to Him with that Faith strengthened from the hearing and reading of His Holy word and the doing of His will.

That coin of Faith, and all that flows from it, is the price of admission, the price that lets the door to the narrow gate swing open.

Come forward in faith, and eat and drink at the Lord's Table. Satisfy and prepare your soul for that Second and Last Advent. The price of this Holy Meal can be paid by anyone.

Come forward in Faith.

AMEN!