

TAPE Angelus

The ~~previous~~ organ music you've been hearing as an introduction to Nidday Prayers on Mondays since October is a modern piece, by a young French organist & composer who was killed in the 2nd World War: the recording, incidentally, was made by his sister, herself an organist of international standing, Marie-Claire Alain. The piece is called 'Litanies' - which is why I chose it for this quarter-hour of prayers; but if you haven't liked it particularly, well, I hope you may find more prayerful the piece I'm going to use as an introduction from next week, for Advent and Christmas-time. Meanwhile, in keeping with the mood of yesterday's Gospel, ^{for} the last Sunday of the Church year, let's begin our formal prayers today, with part of the ^{very old} Litany of the Saints, asking God for mercy and deliverance from evils of all kinds: "All you Saints of God, plead for us - Be merciful, Lord, spare us - Be merciful, Lord, hear and heed us - From every evil, Lord deliver us - From every sin, Lord deliver us - From thy anger, Lord deliver us - From sudden and unforeseen death, Lord deliver us - From the snares of the devil, Lord deliver us - From envy, hatred, and all ill-will, Lord deliver us - From the spirit of melancholy, Lord deliver us - From lightning and tempest, Lord deliver us - From the scourge of earthquake, Lord deliver us - From plague, famine and war, Lord deliver us - From all dangers that threaten us, Lord deliver us - From everlasting death, Lord deliver us - By the mystery of thy holy incarnation, Lord deliver us - By thy coming, Lord deliver us - On the day of Judgment, Lord deliver us."

PRAYERS

Durufle
Requiem - Introit

For a prayer in music today, to continue the November theme, listen to the Introit chant - beginning 'Requiem Aeternam' - from which the name Requiem Mass comes. This is from Durufle's Requiem. 'Lord, grant them eternal rest & let perpetual light shine upon them.'

The gospel, from St. Matthew, read at Mass yesterday is probably the most difficult, as well as being one of the longest, passages from the gospel which you hear at Mass. Apart from the heavy weather most preachers make of it, it somehow ends the Church year with a rather dull flop, which makes us want to get on to Advent as soon as possible.

It's a pity, really, that gospel ~~comes~~ ^{makes} such an anti-climax instead of leaving us with a vision of joy & hope, of Christ coming again and the fulfillment of God's saving plan. For one thing, of course, there's really two different apocalyptic visions in that section of St. Matthew, woven together in such a way ^{so} that the scholars don't fully agree on where one ends & the other begins - so don't worry if it seemed confused to you yesterday. Anyway, with the new scheme of readings for Sundays which comes into use next week, you won't have to stand benumbed through such a long and complicated gospel selection again. But there's another factor which makes yesterday's gospel uncomfortable, and that is a misunderstanding of the special kind of "vision-language", 'apocalypse-language', familiar to the original audience of the Bible and used by Jesus in this passage, but which is unfamiliar to our ways of thinking. The result is ^{people} ~~we~~ look on Christ's promised return as a thing of horror, horror, fear. It's meant to be world-shaking, certainly, but not in any horrific sense: the imagery is meant to be overwhelming, but not paralyzing.

The early Church knew this passage of St Matthew just as we do — but they, much more than we, had a lively hope and expectation and longing for Christ's return in glory, to bring all of creation to its completion, to bring to His Father all of mankind who will have accepted Him and patterned their lives on Him. The piety of the Middle Ages made the Last Judgement a very sombre affair: but it was very real to the men of those days. Having held on to something of that piety, perhaps the modern age has somehow lost sight of the reality a little, instead. Teilhard de Chardin noted the modern Christian lack of expectation, enthusiasm, hope in the final consummation of all things in Christ. But this is just what we should be celebrating at this end of the yearly cycle of the Church's liturgical presentation of the mysteries of Christ and their reproduction in each Christian. The time after Pentecost is a celebration of the mystery of Christ living in the world in His Church, of the eternal life of the New Jerusalem, which is climaxed in the final gathering together of all and everything He has redeemed. If we just let the year peter out, glad or more comfortable in the thought of making a fresh start with Advent, then we've missed out something very important in understanding our faith. Advent & Christmas in fact is not a completely fresh start, for part of the Christian meaning of this celebration is precisely the longing for and expectation of the coming of Christ that is still in the future.