

Laudario di Cortina - introd.

ANGELUS

Matt 3¹⁻⁶

Yesterday being the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, the celebration of that feast took precedence over the 2nd Sunday of Advent - it's not very often now that a fixed feast-day displaces the celebration of Sunday, especially in a time like Advent. Yesterday was also observed as Bible Sunday - so the chances are that you heard a sermon about either Bible Sunday or Our Lady; and the scripture you will have heard read at Mass concerned the feast-day. You will not have heard the new selection of scripture readings for the 2nd Sunday of Advent, in the first series of the new 3-yr. cycle of readings we began only last week. The Gospel I read for you just now, is from St Matthew - as are all the Sunday Gospels in their first year of the cycle. The passage is about St John's work, preaching penance, conversion & the coming of God's Kingdom, and baptizing in water. As we prepare for Christmas, St John is a prominent figure in the liturgical readings & prayers of the Church - understandably so, as he is above all the herald, the announcer of Christ's imminent coming. But Mary is there too, before ~~she~~^{Jesus} makes his appearance among us, the bearer and bringer of Christ into the world. And the whole of the Old Testament too is a preparation, pointing towards the fulcrum of time when God would visit and be with His people in Person. So, each of these 3 themes, facets of preparation for Christ's coming, have a great relevance to our celebration of Advent - and this is a time

to learn and understand each of them more deeply. This can be done, in the last analysis, only through familiarity with the Bible and through prayer. Let's reflect on this as we now recite our usual midday prayer, & the special Advent prayers. PRAYERS

The special Advent antiphon in honour of our Lady is an old one, from the golden age of such hymns - this one, Alma Redemptoris Mater, is attributed to Hermann the Cripple; the musical setting is a later one. Q. (Remind of Coll. Pr.)

Alma Redempt.
(coll. of the Church)
25 53

In these days of so much turmoil in the Church, so much infighting which must seem a scandal or a joy to those outside it (depending on their attitudes to it), all of us have a need to recall a figure like John the Baptist, whether we're conservatives or liberal, or whatever label we subscribe to. In the Bapt. was the last of the O.T. prophets, bridging the time to the NT period in which we live. As a prophet, he spoke fearlessly in God's name, with a message of hope and salvation to come, based on repentance, conversion personal reform to be open to receive God's word and Son when He should appear. He was a herald of Christ, preparing the way for Him. It was not an easy task, and he prepared himself for it by a long frugal way of life. When he spoke, he often spoke harshly, especially of hypocrisy and injustice. It wasn't only the 'authorities' ^{to whom} he pointed out the way they should

be acting — ordinary people, soldiers, merchants, also heard him bluntly and with blinding clarity, pointing out their faults too, and calling them all to reform themselves. John was popular for a time; people flocked to hear him, and many did try to amend their ways of living. Even King Herod took an interest in him — from a distance. But he did dare to confront Herod with the truth about himself & the way he was living; and that was too much for Herod, who promptly had John shut up. Today, all of us baptized in Christ have a slanting in Christ's prophetic function, being the word & message of God's love and care for the world. Many individual Christians do speak their minds, in the manner of John the Baptist, about the social & moral evils of present-day society. Sometimes they're popular, for a while; others are ignored, as creek-pots; some find themselves silenced. What's worrying about present conflicts in the Church is really the way in which ^{some of} the most outspoken spokesmen, on both sides of any debate, differ from the spirit of John & his namesake the Apostle. Where are the heralds of Christ? Where is the clarity, ~~that~~ love of one another, which was Christ's great commandment, and for which the earliest Christian communities were noted among their contemporaries? Prophets we need, & under the guidance of the H. Spirit, will always have — but they'll be bringers of Christ too, men & women who'll have been prepared for their God-given task, in the spirit of John the Baptist.