

1st Sunday of Advent (Sometimes Right, Sometimes Wrong)

“All they that wait on Thee shall not be confounded”—Introit, Gradual, Offer.
“And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty.”

1. From the testimony of St. Bernadette, recounting her experiences at Lourdes, we read: “On the first Sunday after the fifteen days, as I was leaving the church, a police officer took me by the hood and ordered me to follow him. I followed him and as we were walking, he told me that they were going to show me the prison. I listened in silence and we soon arrived at the Police Commissioner’s office. He had me go in a room alone with him. He gave me a chair and I sat down. Then he took some paper and told me to tell him what had happened at the Grotto and I did so. After writing a few lines as I had dictated them to him, he wrote down other things that were completely foreign to me. Then he said that he was going to read it aloud to see if he had made any mistakes, so I listened attentively, but scarcely had he read a few lines when there were already mistakes. I spoke up in a very forthright way: ‘Monsieur, that is not what I said.’ He became angry and he kept insisting ‘yes, I had’ and I kept repeating ‘no I had not.’ These arguments lasted a few minutes and when he saw that he was mistaken and that I would persist in saying that I had not said what He said I said, he would go a little further down his notes and then begin reading what I had never said, and I would keep maintaining that that was not how it had happened. We kept going through this same routine for about an hour and a half.”
2. Not surprisingly, this very same pattern was repeated a few days later in the office of the Imperial Prosecutor. This official claimed “he had papers from the office of the police and that they were different from what [she] was now saying.” St. Bernadette responded: “I told him that I had told exactly the same story before and if the Police Commissioner had made mistakes, that was his problem.” Our Lady chooses her servants well.
3. These men, established in authority, tried to falsify the records using fear, intimidation and confusion tactics on Bernadette... a little girl ... not well educated. Yet, as we heard, she held her ground. There are many such instances in the history of the world. Times when men use circumstances and human weakness to falsify records or make changes that fit their ideas... or re-write history. St. Joan of Arc and the commission for her rehabilitation established by Pope Callixtus III come to mind.

4. Apart from such examples, we also have just plain human stubbornness and errors in judgment. When I was first ordained, I worked for an experienced pastor... At times, I thought I knew things better than he, and perhaps sometimes I did. But he would rightly say of me: "*sometimes right, sometimes wrong, but never in doubt.*" Don't you know someone like that? "*sometimes right, sometimes wrong, but never in doubt.*" Starting with ourselves, the answer is YES! This same pastor used to chide me in front of others, saying, "*make him a bishop while he knows everything.*"
5. The Scriptures are full of examples of what I am referring to here. The friends of Job come to mind. Job called these "friends"... "troublesome comforters" (16:2). Why? Because they tried and tried to convince Job he was indeed in sin. They were unrelenting in their convictions and accusations, refusing to back down. They were utterly convinced they were right and Job was wrong. What happened to them? God sent His angel to speak to Job in a whirlwind... and what did they hear? They were wrong and had displeased God very much. "*My wrath is kindled against thee... because you have not spoken the thing that right before me, as my servant Job hath*" (42:7). Without Job's intercession and sacrifices it seems these troublesome comforters would not have been reconciled to God... hmmm.
6. Have you not heard some one say with some flippancy: "I thought I was wrong once, but found out later I was right." This is funny because everyone knows it is a rare event. Usually it is the other way around... namely that we are convinced we are right only to find out later we were indeed wrong. So it was with the friends of Job... so it is with most of us if we have the humility to admit it... And what if we do not?? Hmmm. There is that angel in the whirlwind... Will we have a true friend like Job to intercede for us?
7. The Pharisees and elders, for differing reasons to be sure, were also utterly convinced that His Majesty was not the Christ they were looking for. On Easter morning, they found out how wrong they were. No matter... they stubbornly held to their erroneous ideas and so too their descendants to this very day. *Sometimes right, sometimes wrong, never in doubt!* So too all those in heresy or error!
8. Perhaps we are in the shoes of Job... having to deal with troublesome comforter-like friends who are stubborn and self-righteous, unwilling to bend or see things might not be as they say. Like Job, is it not true that we long for our day in court when our case might be heard by the highest

authority from which there is no appeal? Then, we think, we can see the other enlightened and disabused of their erroneous ideas and ways? Job was overwhelmed at his own day in court...felt his littleness when the time arrived.

9. In any case, how are such stubborn people as these to learn the truth? Where is this court of the highest authority? As high lord chancellor of the realm of England, St. Thomas More had special cells in his manor at Chelsea where he would bring condemned heretics. He would speak kindly with them seeking to convince them of their errors. Few would budge. Instead, they went to the stake professing their own false opinions to the end. The devil has his martyrs too. Who is right? Who are the true martyrs?? When will everyone know that they were definitively right or wrong and why? The Answer? The General Judgment.
10. Thus, there has to be a time when all the thoughts of men and how they affected others are examined. And this needs to be done in front of those who were with them and all who were affected by them... Job's friends had to be disabused of their ideas in front of Job.
11. Again consider the courtroom. Are not good court cases exciting? Why so? Because often such cases are solved when a third party arrives to reveal in a definitive what was previously unknown... to give witness from an different angle to break the case... In the case of Job the angel came in the whirlwind to convict the troublesome counselors of Job!
12. Notice that the conviction was in a sort of courtroom like setting... they were forced to listen to the angel recount how God is in charge. How God created the universe and made the foundations of the world... and knows all things from beginning to end. Then the angel made known the mistakes of all involved from which there was no appeal...
13. For this reason and many others, we see, therefore, why there must be two judgments. One for each individual upon his death so that his place in heaven, hell or Purgatory can be determined... that he may be punished or rewarded. But also, a second judgment is needed to take place in a sort of court before all mankind. With impeccable evidence and witnesses... with words that will not pass away even if heaven and earth pass away. Everyone must be disabused of his errors of judgment... This is the General Judgment!
14. This is what the first part of Advent calls to mind... that Christ the King will come back and again... to gather all mankind together in order to be judged as a whole, as a people, a society. As the *Dies Irae* indicates in a

few stanzas: "Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth, Through earth's sepulchers it ringeth, ALL before the throne it bringeth. // Death is struck, and nature quaking, All creation is awaking, To its JUDGE an answer making. // Lo, the book exactly worded, Wherein all hath been recorded, Thence shall judgment be awarded."

15. Lessons: (i) Are we so sure we are right all the time? Will our opinions really stand up under the gaze of His Majesty on the Throne of Judgment? May it not be said of us: "sometimes right, sometimes wrong, but never in doubt." In matters of the faith and morals, that is, in essential matters... it is absolutely true that we must be firm and united and never in doubt. In these matters we are not alone but believe as the Church believes... and all She believes has been revealed by God Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. But when dealing with other things non-essential where there is room for some discussion or variation... are we so sure we are right? Let us remember the friends of Job and the terrible judgment they received.
16. (ii) Instead let us maintain a healthy doubt. Speak thus: *I could be wrong but... it seems to me...* It is easy to negotiate or be friends with someone like that, while on the other hand, it is a one-sided affair to work with someone who is *sometimes right, sometimes wrong, but never in doubt*. What will you discuss together? Only what the other thinks is right and wrong according to his book. Humility demands that we maintain a healthy doubt about our abilities and our flawed ways of thinking. Older people are usually considered wise because they know this simple truth... they have been wrong many times and could easily be wrong again. Socrates was considered wise because he knew that he did not know!
17. (iii) To make this possible, let us adopt this saying of St. Thomas More: "To have the last thing in remembrance." May we never forget this... That His Majesty is going to come again... and He will expose all we say and do, and we hold as true and false, good and bad, so that it will be straightened out at the end. Thus, St. Thomas More resolved: "to pray for pardon before the judge comes..." and "To set the mind firmly on the Good Lord and not to hang on upon the words of men's mouths."
18. "All they that wait on Thee shall not be confounded, O Lord. Show, O Lord, Thy ways to me: and teach me Thy paths..."