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On this First Sunday in Advent, we might be struck by how little our lessons for the day seem to do with the Holiday Season. Again, we are confronted with the disparity of the Church's season for preparation when placed in front of the world's preparation for Christmas. And, then, there is the fact that our Lectionary contains the Epistles and Gospels that have been used largely unaltered since the time of Charlemagne. Our Advent lessons are even older than Charlemagne though, going back to the time of the Latin Fathers, around the year 200 AD. This age-old pattern of instruction and meditation, in which Scripture is presented in a doctrinally ordered sequence, seems out of place, but the major theme of Advent rings loud and clear, *-prepare your hearts for the arrival of Jesus Christ!* The lessons for the new few weeks of Advent will prepare us not just for Christ's first coming, which we commemorate on Christmas Day but also for His second coming at the end of the world.

Our many Advent preparations, our devotionals and Advent calendars are meant to aid us in our preparations and help place us spiritually alongside the crowd who lined the street to Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. We are to straw Christ's way with the cloaks and palms of our love and virtues. But we find also a stern warning in this morning's Gospel. In the Gospel we learn that Jerusalem had every outward appearance of being prepared to meet Christ. A great crowd thronged the road joyfully welcoming Jesus into their city, and it seems that Jerusalem finally understood who Christ was and for what purpose He came. They seem, finally, to recognize who Jesus really is. Even the Pharisees, the constant critics of Jesus, stand afar off and remark, *look how the whole world has gone after him.* And, so, a multitude wave palm branches and spread their cloaks in the road to honor Jesus, and to signify that He was a king; some even say that they were at long last receiving Him as their Messiah. However, when Jesus makes it to the heart of that city, to the Temple, which was His rightful house, there were no welcoming crowds. He was not met by the priests and Levites. Instead, He entered the temple and found it in disarray. The great house of prayer had been transformed into a house of commerce, or of buying and selling. The Old Law had been perverted and the Temple, the heart and soul of Israel, the pride and joy of Jerusalem, was turned into a financial operation for purchasing and huckstering sacrifices. The worship of God had been monetized in every way imaginable.

This grievous sin was an exploitation of the Law of the Old Testament. The Israelites were commanded by God to bring the first and best of their flocks or produce and to present it before the Lord in His Temple. Yet the priests had made it so that even if the very best was brought before them, if it was not bought in the Temple courts, then it was not worthy to be offered on the altar. One can only imagine the disparity that grew from this practice. The worship of God became expensive, and the poor were unable to offer their sacrifices religiously. The priests and Levites were strangling the spiritual life from the holy temple for a profit. When Jesus entered the Temple, they were not prepared to meet Him. The house of prayer that was rightfully His and the center of religious life for every Israelite was on the verge of spiritual death. But Jesus, being truly about His Father's business, threw the money changers and *them that bought and sold* out of the Temple and out of the presence of God.

This Gospel lesson shows us those who were prepared to meet Jesus, in the crowd that waved palm branches, and those who were not prepared to meet Jesus, amongst the money changers in the Temple. The multitude who joyfully celebrated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, prepared His way the best way they could with what was at hand, palm branches and the cloaks they wore. Ideally this celebration would have processed right into the heart of the Temple. But once we reach the temple, the obstinate and hard-hearted materialists resist and halt the procession of worship and adoration. Perhaps they were oblivious to the significance of the events taking place outside or maybe they fully intended to bring the celebration to a halt in the Temple Court. The souls of the money changers were deadened by capitalizing from man's desire to worship God perfectly. And by doing so, they made the Lord's own house unrecognizable to Him. They concerned themselves with the Letter of the Law and forgot the Love of God.

What a warning this is to us this morning. Lord willing, we will be among that number who prepare and celebrate the Lord's Advent with the best that we have, even if it is with only palm branches and the coats we wear. But there will be some who remain totally oblivious, unknowingly having replaced God the Son with Mammon. And there will be those also who by all appearance have all the outward signs of being prepared for Christ's coming at Christmas and even at the Second Coming of Christ, but their hearts are not prepared. Our hearts must be cleansed all sin; emptied of the works of spiritual darkness, the works of hatred and uncharity, of everything that will lead to spiritual death. We must prepare our hearts so that

the light of Christ can shine brightly through us. We must prepare ourselves to meet Christ this Christmas and when He comes again in clouds of glory.

Let us pray for a good and holy Advent. That this Advent the souls of the faithful will be stirred up to new life, that the spiritually dead will be revived and awakened to new life in Christ. Let us pray, *We beseech thee, Almighty God, to purify our consciences by thy daily visitation, that when thy Son our Lord cometh he may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*