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Our Society has one interesting concept of preparing for Christmas and subsequently of judgment, enshrined in the popular Christmas song *Santa Claus is coming to town*. The words to the song mention *Santa Claus is coming to town... He's making a list... he's checking it twice... he knows who's been naughty or nice...he sees you when your sleeping...he knows if your awake...he knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake*. It is amazing how well known and popular this song is given that it débuted in the middle of the Great Depression. But this song summarizes all the popular legends about Santa Claus, namely that Santa comes to be our judge. When we were children many of us were very concerned with being on Santa's good-list, because we fully believed that on Christmas Eve Santa would come and reward our goodness with presents or our wickedness with coal. But belief in Santa Claus is convenient in that as soon as one does not believe in Santa, the fear of Santa's judgment evaporates.

It is not too difficult to draw parallels between Santa Clause's coming and his judgment of our behavior and that part of Jesus's coming which makes everyone a little nervous, of His coming in power and glory to judge the world. We can spend countless hours trying to discern if these are indeed the last days, and what those last days will actually be like. However, we hear in this morning's Gospel for this Second Sunday in Advent what Jesus has to say about the end of the world and His second coming. This warning about the end of the world happens after Jesus's Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem and cleansing of the Temple which we heard of last week. How disorienting this prophecy is when compared with what just happened in the streets of Jerusalem. Jesus says, *and then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory...then look up and lift up your heads; for your redemption drawth nigh*. The disciples and all of Jerusalem had just witnessed a remarkable, unexpected, and spontaneous display of worship and adoration in the multitude who sang *hosanna*, and waved palm branches while Jesus entered Jerusalem. They may have even still been surprised that Jesus had pronounced His judgment on the Temple and cleansed *the Temple of the money-changers and them that bought and sold in the Temple* courts and had gotten away with it.

How unsettling these lessons in the Gospels are. This same Jesus who we are preparing to meet who was born in a humble manger. He is the very picture of humility, who for most of His adult life had *no place to lay His head*. His closest friends were common fishermen and unpopular tax collectors, and women of ill repute. The very same Jesus who claims to be not just a king but the promised Messiah, who has also raised the dead, healed the sick, and cast out demons, and yet He enters Jerusalem on a donkey, the very symbol of humility. This meek and humble Jesus now prophecies to us of the end of the world, of His coming again in power and great glory from heaven, and of the judgment that is to follow. To top it all off, the Gospel lesson ends with Jesus' words, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Heaven and earth shall pass away but the words of the Infant Son of God, born in a manger, shall not pass away; the words of Christ who entered Jerusalem on a humble donkey, shall not pass away.*

Yet, He who comes to judgment is our cause for the hope of salvation. That gift of God that is found in the Holy Scriptures, the written words of Christ, which we are promised *shall never pass away*, help to prepare us to meet Jesus who comes to be our just and righteous judge. We are told in the Revelation of St. John that Jesus is the only one worthy to judge, the only one worthy to loose the seals of the book of life, and all of heaven proclaims that Christ's judgment will be perfect. Far better, far more merciful even than jolly old saint Nick's judgment, is the judgment of Jesus who sees the heart, the true intention, the striving to do what is right. And whether or not we really believe in Christ, we shall all stand before Him for judgment and unwrap the gift of eternal life or the gift of eternal separation from Him.

Fr. Austin Ferrer puts so wonderfully, *ADVENT brings Christmas, judgement runs out into mercy. For the God who saves us and the God who judges us is one God. We are not, even, condemned by his severity and redeemed by his compassion; what judges us is what redeems us, the love of God. What is it that will break our hearts on judgment day? Is it not the vision, suddenly unrolled, of how he has loved the friends we have neglected, of how he has loved us, and we have not loved him in return; how, when we came (as now) before his altar, he gave us himself, and we gave him half—penitences, or resolutions too weak to commit our wills? But while love thus judges us by being what it is, the same love redeems*

*us by effecting what it does. Love shares flesh and blood with us in this present world, that the eyes which look us through at last may find in us a better substance than our vanity.*

We continue on our journey through Advent, preparing ourselves to meet Christ when He comes in the manger on Christmas day and at the end of the world. We prepare ourselves to meet Him also in Holy Communion, and as our judge. How grateful we should be that our coming judge is God's Love and Mercy incarnate. His judgment is not based only upon good behavior, but on whether or not and to what extent the Gospel has sunk into our hearts and moved our wills to reveal Him to the world. We shall be judged on how and to what extent we have received God's love and responded to His grace by revealing it to the world in our intentions and works. Amen.