

Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Advent, December 21st, 2025 – Esto fidelis – Be faithful (Apc 2:10)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

My dearly beloved in Our Lord,

“Here now it is required among the dispensers, that a man be found faithful.” (Epistle, 1Cor 4:2)

Faithfulness, fidelity, has a lot to do with Faith. Faith is that primary divine virtue through which God establishes a relationship with our soul: “But without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Hebr 11:6) Once God has gratified, justified and embellished our soul with His grace and presence, it is our strictest duty to be true and faithful to the gift received.

This is the Christian life in a nutshell: God takes action, and we need to follow suit. It is a tale of God’s bounty and our response to whatever God, through His infinite goodness, does in our favor.

Therefore it is very important that we conceive our relationship with God as one of duties – and not rights, as the moderns do! It is required to be found faithful, St Paul says; and not, it would be nice if you were faithful...

God has all rights, He is the Creator, He is “the boss”.

We have mostly duties, not rights. We need to correspond to God’s grace. And all is grace.

Thus St John the Baptist and his preaching are a strong reminder of what we need to do.

Last Sunday we have heard how he professed who he was, and who he was not. He showed himself to be one of those faithful servants whom Our Lord so many times praises in his parables. Several of the parables he concludes with the words: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Mt 25:23). St John the Baptist said he was not Christ; but the voice of one calling to prepare Christ's coming. As soon as Christ began his public life and ministry, he acknowledged that he had to step back. He let his disciples follow Our Lord without any jealousy, he even encouraged them to follow Jesus and to leave him, John. He said: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (Jn 3:30) Eventually, as the Fathers remark, this happened even physically since St John was made one head shorter, and Our Lord was lifted up on a Cross.

So the first step in order to prove ourselves to be faithful, is to fulfill the Commandments, the explicit orders God or the Church give us, and everything directly connected with them.

The next step is to do so not only out of necessity, or fear of reprisals. More and more we need to accomplish the will of God lovingly, promptly and with humility. In St Luke Our Lord teaches us this step forward: “So you also, when you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do.” (Lk 17:10) A servant or a slave does not have much choice in doing what he does. But still, there can be a lot of pride, or undue sense of satisfaction in what they have done or accomplished. In order to be found truly trustworthy and faithful, they need to acknowledge that they have done nothing extraordinary, nothing beyond the scope of what has been demanded from them, when they have finished their service. So also we should learn to grow in humility of heart through serving God as He deserves.

Finally we can and should progress further by seeking to anticipate in a certain manner God’s demands. Good children act in this way towards their parents, loyal employees towards their masters. They know what is good to do, or pleasing their superiors. Therefore they do it, even it is not asked from them, or imposed.

We need to learn to act not only to avoid sin, mortal or venial; but also to avoid anything that displeases God, or what we know to be less perfect than what we could do, in view of the given circumstances; and finally to seek to please God, to act for His pleasure only.

Our Lord did this, and he told us so: “For I do always the things that please him... that sent me.” (cf. Jn 8:29)

So we can make good use of this last week of Advent to progress in our manner of serving God. For some this means breaking with mortal sin, ridding themselves of a habit of offending God seriously; for others, to step over their own shadow, as we say, in order to serve Our Lord more

fervently in one point or another; for others still, to purify the motives of their actions so that they be done for God's honor and glory, rather than for other motives, as praiseworthy as these might be.

All this needs to be done in view of Our Lord's coming, as we have said all these past weeks: The remembrance of his first coming in the Incarnation; his second coming through grace into our souls, which needs to be ongoing and progressive; and his last coming which will be so terrifying for Christ's enemies and so consoling for his true friends and servants. Thus St Paul concludes the Epistle: "Therefore, pass no judgment before the time, until the Lord comes, Who will both bring to light the things hidden in darkness and make manifest the counsels of hearts; and then everyone will have his praise from God."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.