

ROUND-TRIP JOURNEY

By The Rev'd Canon C. Russell Elliott

The Book of Common Prayer recognizes Advent as a time of solemnity and prayer without requiring it to be a period of major fasting or abstinence like Lent. It is also noted that all Sundays, like Easter, are Feast days, and so they are designated as Sundays IN Advent and Lent, not days OF those seasons. In our observance of Advent we may take more liberty in meditation than during Lent, a little more than reflecting specifically (as we have done for over 1600 years) on the Four Last Things: death, judgment, heaven, hell.

I am not suggesting that we ignore these four things but that we concentrate on the journey to them more than on getting there, more on the way than on the destination. In other words, let's look on our life as a journey, birth to death, and now we should stop at this Advent lay-by to check our progress. A simple way of doing this is threefold: circum-spection (looking all around), intro-spection (looking within yourself) and expectation (looking outward and forward).

Several years ago our family planned a round trip from Halifax-Montreal-Quebec-Gaspe-New Brunswick and back to Halifax again, not too exciting or prolonged or expensive, but with lots of sightseeing, history, culture and geography added in. Halifax was only the end-point but when we arrived back we were all different, improved, better persons. Your life itself is such a journey, a round trip - and everything that happens along the way, absolutely everything, shapes what you will be, will have become, by the end of the journey. You are already putting pieces into place for your end, the time of your death, judgment, heaven and hell.

Your journey had a starting point. When God created you like Himself He put you on the earth, setting you a little apart from Himself, giving you freedom to choose and act and to be responsible. He never let go entirely because in your baptism you became the Spirit-filled child of God. "*Lo, I am with you always.*" At the end you will return to Him again. Now, part way along your life journey, you are very fortunate; you can keep on the way, change directions, take detours, even do a little backtracking. Your life is what you make it; Advent will help.

What God expects of us is really very simple and frank: get your life back to the moral cleanliness that it was like when you were created. That may be simple but it's not easy!

Every day of our life we make thousands of decisions, some right and good some wrong and bad, some from very bad habits such as losing our temper, snubbing some people, being self-centered. Advent is a good time to check habits. It really is possible to be perfect and we should never settle for anything less.

Yet we live in a sinful world, in a very secular society, and a Christian must have courage

to walk your journey without drifting into worldly ways. Three examples may help you to recognize the difficulty:

- a. Our market system and its advertising try to turn us into consumers, bent on acquiring things honestly or dishonestly, wasting things, throwing them away, so that we are destroying our environment. We are all consumers but we are much more than that, and must resolutely resist all this waste and destruction.

- b. God made us male and female. The union sanctified by marriage is a divine aid which helps whenever we are inclined to break our vows, damage family life, and ravage the individual lives of children, young girls and other innocent people. Whatever our hungers or inclinations or orientations may be, Christians are expected to harness and control them so that we, and all whose lives we touch, may grow and flourish as true humans.

- c. Both consumer hungers and sexual hungers in our society are being psyched to such a pitch that all sorts of gross violence are daily occurrences - and killing people is a common way of solving differences. We Christians recognize the worth and dignity of each human and respect all human life in general - and we can set an example for all around us.

Think on these things so that at the end of your journey, when our Lord comes to you or you come to Him, you will rejoice - because, for one thing, you will have no more decisions to make!

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