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SERMON 1: ON ADVENT¹

1. *The one desired by all the nations will come.* Haggai 2:8.

[Prothema] *There is a time and opportunity for each affair*, Wisdom 8:6. It is fitting that anyone who is wise, as a rational substance, consider action as power prompting an effect by strength, duration as presence promoting affection by enjoyment, and intention as diligent enlightenment of the intellect by congruity. The words proposed in the second verse, therefore, concern causing an effect by considering action through the power of strength when stating: *each affair*; the promotion of affection by considering duration through the presence of enjoyment in what follows: *There is a time*; and the enlightenment of the intellect by considering intention through the truth of congruity with the addition: *and opportunity*. At the outset of our words, let us, dearly beloved, first call upon the Father of mercies from whom comes every strength through inflowing power, enjoyment through inflowing goodness, and congruity through inflowing truth, so that he make us strong in exercising power, blessed in

¹ This translation of the *Sunday Sermons* is based on the text in *Sancti Bonaventurae Sermones dominicales*, edited by Jacques Guy Bougerol, Bibliotheca Franciscana scholastica Medii Aevi 27 (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1977). All references to "the critical edition" refer to this text. Unless otherwise noted, all other references to the writings of Saint Bonaventure are found in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae opera omnia*, 10 volumes (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1882-1902) and are cited by volume and page number.

abiding grace, and rational in intending glory. Provoked then in effect through powerful action, moved in affection by enduring enjoyment, and enlightened in intellect by appropriate intention, we may be able to say and hear those things that are to the praise of the one who "from all eternity, commands the course of time"² and is described in Daniel as *the ancient of days*;³ he whose grace we desire for the sake of our consolation in the present and whose glory we await in the future. Amen.

[Sermon] 2. *The one desired by all the nations will come.* Since the nature of mercy is to console the desolate and the afflicted, *Father of mercy and every consolation*,⁴ seeing the holy fathers vehemently desolate, afflicted by the delay of his promise, and multiplying their insistent prayer for a swift response with thirsting souls and the most pious affections, deigned to console them in a manifold manner with the proposed passage and assure them concerning the fulfillment of the promised blessing saying: *the one desired by all the nations will come.* But given that liberality fosters petitions and utility promotes, and sincerity inclines the merciful ears of the divine to answering, the proposed passage notes three things: first, liberality is found in the coming Son of God; second, sincerity of soul belongs to the people who offer petitions; third, utility is proper to the subsequent end. First, the coming Son of God displays great liberality because he neither sent someone nor wrote something, but rather, came personally; thus it says he *will come*. Second, the

² See Book III. M 9 in *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio*, edited by Lvdoovicvs Bieler, CCSL xciv; (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), 51. The original has *iubes* ("you command") while Bonaventure has *iubet* ("one who commands").

³ Dan 7:9.

⁴ See 2 Cor 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation."

people who petitioned manifested great sincerity by asking for the Son of God and not for gold or other temporal goods; therefore, *the one desired* is added. Third, great utility is seen in the subsequent end, that is, the New Testament, for through that advent all people are called to God's truth. That is why *all the nations* is included.

3. It says, therefore, he *will come*, where the liberality of the person coming is noted. If someone asks the principal reason and cause for God coming in the flesh, the best reason is the most excellent liberality of God by which, according to which, and because of which the Word became incarnate. This coming proceeds from liberality, offers liberality, and leads to liberality. The Son of God, moved by such great liberality, wished to become human⁵ so he might come: first, as the most gracious mediator displaying the remedies of peace and harmony; second, as the most truthful doctor offering proofs of piety⁶ and justice; third, as the most humble king, demonstrating examples of humility and subjection, that is, of poverty and indigence; and so for the first reason he must be loved sincerely as mediator; second, he must be humbly revered as doctor; third, he must be imitated as precursor through conformity

4. First, he comes as the most gracious mediator to display the remedies of peace and harmony. Ephesians 2:14-17 speaks of this: *For he himself is our peace, he it is*

⁵ See c. 46 in *Saint John Damascene De fide orthodoxa*. Versions of Burgundio and Cerbanus, edited by Eligius M. Buytaert, Franciscan Institute Publications Text Series No. 8 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1955), 172: *Ideo non hominem deificatum dicimus, sed Deum humanatum.*

⁶ Piety is a rich concept in Bonaventure's thought that includes God's merciful relationship with humanity. See Johnson, "The Prothemes of Bonaventure's *Sermones Dominicales*" in *Franciscans at Prayer*, 115-19.

who has made both one, and has broken down the intervening wall of the enclosure, the enmity, in his flesh. He has voided the Law of the commandments expressed in the decrees; ... coming he preached peace to us. The Son of God, assuming human nature in the unity of his person, made both, that is, divinity and humanity, one, by taking on the voluntary torment of the cross and death without obligation, so that free from all sin, he voided the divine decree that closed the door of paradise; breaking down the intervening wall of hostility and discord, which was between us and God; as so Christ, as the true mediator, in coming he preached peace, and established harmony between us and God through himself and not through another, as that would not be fitting. It would not be appropriate even for an angel since the angel cannot satisfy what is required by divine justice; not an angel in human form, who would come down to take the part of humanity voluntarily, would be appropriate; likewise no human being could be raised up to the pristine state in which he was subject to God alone, because such a great blessing is held for an angel; no human being could accomplish this either since humanity is unable to restore what was lost since the first parents lost this innocence for themselves and their progeny; nor God without the incarnation since there is no obligation and, just as importantly, he would be considered suspect by humanity; but is appropriate for Christ, both God and man, because in as much he is God he can, and as much as he is human, he must, and therefore he arouses suspicion from neither side. This is what Bernard says: "Why is it clear to me that neither side must turn away from my liberator? You say: *God decreed mercy and he knows the one most pleasing to accomplish it; let him empty and humble himself, and let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.* So in a sign of peace he will bring about security from peace. Fitting to all sides, let him then not be held suspect by anyone. Let the Son of

God become a son of man and so make me certain with this kiss of his mouth and become, thus, the certain mediator, the Son of God whom I know. He will never be suspect to me: my brother and my flesh."⁷

5. Second, he comes as the most truthful doctor to offer proofs of piety and justice. That is why Hosea 10:12 reads: *Sow justice for yourselves in justice, and reap with words of mercy, break up your fallow ground: but the time to seek the Lord is, when he who will teach you justice comes.* We seek the *Lord* when we ask for his grace; however, the *time* for asking this grace that we might be renewed from the ancient fault is; when Christ, the true doctor, *comes*; it is *he who will teach* us in word and deed to sow the truth of *justice* through punishment and the piety of *mercy* through forgiveness, for pious mercy without just punishment does not reckon with fault but ignores it. Whence Isaiah 26:10 states: *Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn to do justice,* because severe justice without pious mercy is not pleasing to God; in fact, *let justice without mercy be done to the one who did not act mercifully.*⁸ According to the teaching of Christ, *mercy* in forgiveness should *triumph over judgment* in punishment; and this so that the severity of punishment does not drive the sinner to anguish and despair, but rather, the liberality of mercy, which forgives easily, should draw the sinner to penance.

6. Third, he comes as the most humble king to demonstrate examples of humility and indigency. As Zechariah 9:9 says: *Behold your king, comes to you, the just one and*

⁷ Bonaventure adapts Bernard's Sermon 2 n. 6 on The Song of Songs. See SBOp 1.11-12.

⁸ See James 2:13: "Judgment is merciless to the one who did not act mercifully."

savior: he is poor, riding on a donkey. In order to destroy the pride of the first human being, Christ, our King, did not want to come haughty and proud with chariots and finely adorned horses, but humble and weak on the Day of Palms, *riding a donkey*, in order to call worldly people back from the love of the world and to encourage the love of God. He did not wish to come pompously, with riches and precious stones, but *poor* and needy, so that all pride might be destroyed through his humility and the evil of the world might be recognized through his poverty, for he is the true *Savior*. The Lord states this in Matthew 20:28: *The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life for the redemption of many.* The proud part of the body certainly is shamed when the head is humble; in any case it is grotesque if the foot does not want to imitate and subject itself to the head, but wants to place itself above it.

7. It follows: *the one desired.* Here longing and sincerity of the people petitioning is expressed.⁹ The holy fathers desired the incarnation of the Son of God with eager sincerity of heart, since in him there were three things that satisfy every desire. There are, in fact, three qualities that rendered something desirable according to its nature: it looks beautiful; it is useful; and tastes delicious. Something is sufficiently desirable according to its manner, when first it delights one's sight when viewed; second, it adorns the subject when possessed, third, it is pleasing to taste when used or enjoyed. These three are found in the most excellent way in our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, not just the holy fathers but all rational beings should, quite rightly, desire him. First, Christ is desirable

⁹ On prayer, the desire of the nations and the Incarnation, see *In vigilia nativitatis*, Sermo 1 in *Sancti Bonaventurae Sermons de diversis*, vol. 1, 67-82.

and beautiful to gaze upon due to the splendor of original innocence; second, he is useful and precious to possess due to the adornment of illuminating grace; third, he is noble and delectable to enjoy due to the taste of pleasing wisdom.¹⁰

8. First, he is the desired one because the splendor of original innocence delights the sight when viewed. No one was without actual or original sin except Christ alone, who is *more beautiful than the sons of men*,¹¹ *the desire of the everlasting hills*,¹² that is, of the angels and the holy fathers, *the spotless mirror of the majesty of God*,¹³ *more splendid than the sun*,¹⁴ in whom angels desire to gaze,¹⁵ and truly he is symbolized by Solomon according to 1 Kings 10:24: *All the earth desired to see the face of Solomon.* In manifold fashion the figure represented by Solomon is the true Solomon, who is Christ. Augustine says as much in Book 17 of the *City of God*: "The things said of Solomon are really appropriate to Christ alone, since

¹⁰ The juxtaposition of beauty and wisdom is also found in Book II, d. 30, a. 1. q. 1 of his *Sentence Commentary* in II,714a, where Bonaventure discusses the human body before and after the Fall. His appeal to the category of beauty when speaking of Christ underscores the aesthetical dimension of the Incarnation. On Bonaventure, aesthetics and the body, see John Seward, "Fresh Flowers Again: Saint Bonaventure and the Aesthetics of the Resurrection," *Downside Review* 110 (1992), 1-29.

¹¹ See Ps 44:3: "You are more beautiful than the sons of men."

¹² See Gen 49:26: "The blessings of your father are strengthened with the blessings of his fathers until the desire of the everlasting hills should come...."

¹³ See Wis 7:26.

¹⁴ See Wis 7:29.

¹⁵ See 1 Peter 1:12: "To them (the prophets) it was revealed that not to themselves, but to you, they were ministering those things which now have been declared to you by those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Into these things angels desire to look."

in Solomon the figure is veiled, but in Christ the truth is represented."¹⁶

9. Second, Christ is the desired one because his precious illuminating grace, when possessed, adorns a particular subject. Whence Isaiah 29:9: *My soul desired you in the night so it might see light in your light. The soul desired you in the night, that is, of darkness and ignorance, so it might see light in your light; by reason of this preciousness, Proverbs 3:15 says: All those things desired do not compare to her; because just as nothing is comparable between a shadow and a similitude to the truth, so too, nothing is comparable between created and divine wisdom; for every creature is a similitude and a shadow of divine truth.*

10. Third, Christ is desirable because the pleasure of soothing wisdom, when enjoyed, is delightful and sweet to the taste. Whence Song of Songs 2:3 says: *I sat under the shadow of him whom I desired and his fruit was sweet to my taste. Under the shadow of refreshing grace; of him, that is of Christ; whom I desired with the ecstatic stirring of love; I sat with a quiet mind; and his fruit was sweet to my taste due to the taste of soothing wisdom. Thus in order to taste the sweetness of divine wisdom, the soul must be purged from sin, cleansed in the water of devotion, and pulled away from earthly love, so it is not distracted among outer concerns, but indeed able to draw itself completely inward toward interior matters,*

¹⁶ Bonaventure adapts Book XVII, c. 8 of *De civitate Dei*. See CCSL xlviii (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957) xlviii, 571 and FC 24, 49: "Now, this psalm (71) contains so much that cannot possibly be fitted in with Solomon's life – that does, on the other hand, apply to Christ our Lord with perfectly pellucid propriety – that it makes clear as daylight how in Solomon there was only a faint adumbration of the substantial reality reserved for our contemplation in Christ."

lest some darkness interfere with it directly receiving the showers of divine influence and tasting the sweetness of eternal kindness. The prophet David, who experienced this sweetness in a certain way, said in Psalm 41:2: *As the deer desires flowing waters, so too does my soul desire you, God.*

11. Third, the utility of the sought-after end is noted when it says: *all the nations*. Christ was, quite rightly, the desired one of the holy fathers and all the nations because, in this coming, he first merited all the nations, the grace of a favorable adoption by deleting the original fault; second, the opening of the heavenly gate by relaxing the just judgment; third, the sublimity of final glory by removing all misery.

12. First, through the coming of Christ the nations sought after the grace of compassionate adoption through the deletion of the original fault. That is why Peter says in Acts 11:17-18: *If the Lord, therefore, gave this same grace to them, that is, the nations, just as he did for us who have believed in Jesus Christ, so too has he given the nations repentance leading to life. This blessing is why Prophet David invited all the nations to give thanks in Psalm 116:1-2 Praise the Lord all you nations, praise him all you peoples, because he has confirmed his mercy upon us, that is, a favorable adoption.*

13. Second, all the nations, through this coming, sought the opening of the heavenly gate through the relaxation of the just judgment. Isaiah 26:2-3 speaks of this: *Open your gates and let the just nation enter that keeps the truth. The ancient fault has passed away because the Lord Jesus Christ possessed the key unlocking the entrance to eternity. Such was his authority that he said*

to the angelic spirits: *Princes, open your gates*¹⁷ because the restoration of universal harmony, the relaxation of the just judgment, has been accomplished through my blood. Now that the flaming sword guarding the gate of paradise¹⁸ has been removed, I want the door of heaven to be unlocked so that *the just nation enter that keeps the truth*.¹⁹ The *ancient fault* of the first transgression, that rightly required punishment, has indeed *passed away*.

14. Third, the nations sought, through this coming, the sublimity of final glory through the removal of all misery. Whence Isaiah 66:12: *I will bring upon her; as it were, a river of peace, and as an overflowing torrent the glory of the nations*. The previously stated theme speaks of this: *The one desired by all the nations will come, and I will fill that house with glory*. This will be fulfilled in the general resurrection when the body of each of the blessed, which through grace was the home and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the gift of impassibility will remove all corruption, the gift of clarity will remove every deformity and obscurity, the gift of agility will remove all slowness, and the gift of strength and sublimity, that is spirituality, will remove every infirmity and sensuality. Whence Augustine in Book 22 of the *City of God*: "All deformity, slowness, infirmity, and corruption will be cast from our bodies."²⁰ That he might deign to grant us that, etc.

¹⁷ See Ps 23:9: "Princes, lift up your gates."

¹⁸ See Gen 3:24: "And God cast out Adam and placed before the paradise of pleasure cherubim and a flaming sword, which turned in all directions, to guard the way to the tree of life."

¹⁹ See Isa 26:2: "You, open the gates and let the just nation that keeps the truth enter in."

²⁰ Bonaventure adapts Book XXII, c. 20 n. 3. See CCSL xlviii, 841.