Advent Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent



Alfred J. Delp, S.J.

Homily for the Second Sunday of Advent

Preached in Munich on December 7, 1941

Taken from *Advent of the Heart* by Alfred J. Depp, S.J, pp. 62–66

"Why did you go out into the desert? What did you want to see?" (Mt 11:7). We spoke last Sunday about how, for us, Advent is more than the celebration of some kind of historical remembrance, and more than the celebration of a season with its own liturgical color and its own liturgical ritual. Each liturgical season has its own individual meaning and its own assignment. In that sense, the deepest meaning of Advent is man's meeting with the Ultimate, with the Absolute. Therefore, our Advent considerations comprised man's understanding in perspective of the end, man encountering the Absolute with the knowledge of the end, the final destination. We considered what will become of us there and how we should inwardly, on the deepest level, decide and live and act from this spiritual center and prove ourselves.

The first Advent message about this encounter with the Absolute, with the end, was the Gospel message that we read last Sunday about the violent shaking. At the end, the world will be shaken; and then the Son of Man will come. That is more than just historical prophecy. It is also a basic principle that somehow the coming of God and the shaking of mankind are connected. It means that then, if man is inwardly unshaken, inwardly incapable of a real deep shaking—if he continues to be obstinate and hard and superficial and inadequate—then God the Lord will intervene in world history Himself. He will teach us what it means to be set

ignatius press

shaking and to be touched at the very center of our being. Therefore, the big question for us is whether we are still capable of truly being shaken, or shall it continue this way? Shall it continue that we look at thousands and thousands of things and know about them? That we know about those things that we don't like—about things which we know should not be and must not be—and that we accustom ourselves to all of it? What have we already accustomed ourselves to, in the course of the year, in the course of the weeks and months? And we stand here unshaken, untouched, inwardly unmoved!

To this message about being deeply shaken, the Second Sunday of Advent adds a new word, a message about man's *authenticity*. Someone who encounters the Ultimate, who knows about the end, must let go of every compromise. In the presence of the Ultimate the only thing that survives is what is authentic. All compromise shatters there. All cheap negotiating shatters there. All half-truths, and all double-meanings, and all masks, and all poses shatter there. The only thing that stands the test is what is authentic. It has evolved into what it was intended to become. Reality is ordered according to the authentic and healthy, to that which is true in being, and true in words, and true in deeds. Try removing from our lives—from our presence—everything that is inauthentic in being. Remove all cramps, all poses, all arrogance and hubris, and all human rebelliousness. How much of our lives disappears with these things? How much space would be freed up—and for what purpose? Really, for man, for God, and for life itself—think how much room would become free for life that is suffocating now![1] Now take from our lives all that is inauthentic in our speech. Take the lies away. How different relationships would be, if no one needed to figure on the other person speaking with a double meaning, or guardedly, or camouflaged—let alone deliberately lying! If a word were a word again, and a sentence were a sentence again, and a fact counted as a fact, how very different life would be!

In the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent, the figure of John the Baptist appears. Our Lord says of him: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed driven to and fro by the wind? Or what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Look, those wearing soft clothing are in the palaces of kings. Or why did you go out? What did you want to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is the one of whom it is written, 'See, I send My messenger before You to prepare the way for You' " (Mt 11:7–10). This figure of John stands before us, solitary, austere, and weathered by the storms and lonelinesses of the desert and weathered by the storms and lonelinesses of the prison—but authentic.

The figure of John demonstrates two laws about authentic people and shatters two dangers to which man's authenticity generally succumbs. He shatters two situations in which an authentic man so very often suffocates and drowns. The first law and the first danger: the prophet stands before the king. And the first point: do not permit regard for private security or personal existence to make you into an inauthentic person. So very often throughout history, whenever prophet and king have encountered one another, the king is always in the superior position. What is easier, what is simpler, than to muzzle a prophet! Yet, indeed, hasn't it been—not the voices of those who went into the palaces and were welcome there—but rather the voices calling in the wilderness who filled the cosmos, who prepared the way, who directed people toward Advent, and who arranged for the proper meeting with the end and the Ultimate?

Prophet and king! The prophet must have known that the king's power and force and majesty would fall upon him and crush him if he said, "*Non licit*: That is wrong because it is inauthentic and is not in accordance with the divine order." And John said it, and he was crushed, and he was brutalized, and—for all time and eternity—he stands as the witness within history, as the witness before the face

[1] A reference to the word *Lebensraum*, "room for living". In Nazi ideology and propaganda, the word referred to the territorial space and environment "necessary to the autarchy of a growing nation" (Cornelia Berning, *Vom "Abstammungsnachweis" zum "Zuchtwart": Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964], p. 120). —Trans.

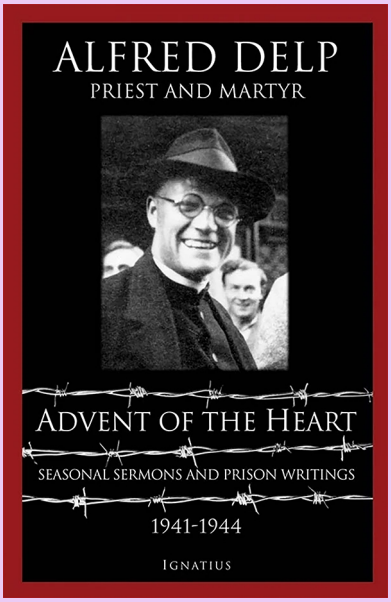
of the Lord, as authenticity itself. And he was right!

Along with that are the second law and the second danger. Futility or ineffectiveness do not dispense one from speaking the truth, declaring what is wrong, and standing up for what is right and just. How could this prophet think he could interfere in the family history and family scandals of the king, and be successful? Whoever considers success, or makes his decisions or attitudes dependent upon whether something is futile or certain of success, is already corrupt. Then authenticity no longer means his personal encounter with what is real; it is rather his personal dependence upon success, upon being heard, on popularity and applause, and on the roar of the great throngs. He is already corrupt. And woe, if the prophets are mute out of fear that their word might not be heeded.

You must let people notice that you know about the end and have grasped that one of the essential features of life is called *Advent*. And that means encounter with an Ultimate and Absolute. And that means being impressed, being forged in this loneliness with the Absolute, and therefore, whenever it is time to give testimony, being untouched and untouchable when faced with compromise, half-measures, silence, anxiety, or cowardice. May God grant that we have people, that we have prophets, who unseal the actual meaning of Advent to us, and who are authentic, and who offer an authentic witness!

Enjoy more from

Advent of the Heart



Available Formats

Paperback

eBook

Fr. Alfred Delp, S.J., was a heroic German Jesuit priest who was imprisoned and martyred by the Nazis in a Nazi death camp in 1945. At the time of his arrest, he was the Rector of St. Georg Church in Munich, and had a reputation for being a gripping, dynamic preacher, and one who was an outspoken critic of the Nazi regime. He was an important figure in the Resistance movement against Nazism.

Accused of conspiring against the Nazi government, he was arrested in 1944, tortured, imprisoned, and executed on Feb 2, 1945. While in prison, Fr. Delp was able to write a few meditations found in this book, which also includes his powerful reflections from prison during the Advent season about the profound spiritual meaning and lessons of Advent, as well as his sermons he gave on the season of Advent at his parish in Munich. These meditations were smuggled out of Berlin and read by friends and parishioners of St. Georg in Munich.