



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"Resolution."**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Isaiah 2:1-5
Second Reading Romans 13:8-14
Gospel Matthew 24:37-44

Advent is an interesting season in the Church year, but it is all too short. We barely get a chance to think about John the Baptist and Mary and Jesus' ancestors before Christmas arrives. The Church of England tried to address this for a while by extending the pre-Christmas season by a few more Sundays, but for most of us, Advent is marked by only four candles in the wreath, and four chances to tell a congregation about what Advent means.

This year, I am taking a page out of the book of old Anglican custom and am preaching on the subject of "The Last Things". These are traditionally listed as Death, Heaven, Hell and Eternity. I'm going to adapt that a little, although I'll be covering the most important bits, and am beginning today with the theme of getting ready.

I originally thought that this would take a decidedly pious direction. I wanted to talk about being prepared for eventualities. I wanted to remind those who have given little thought to it that they need to prepare not only for next year, but also for the time when the years run out. Few members of the congregation, for example, have given much thought to preparing for their funerals whether here at Holy Trinity or somewhere else and letting their lawyers, families and the church office know. They

will, I supposed, leave that heartache to their supposed loved-ones who will be left to second guess last wishes and fight over what form the service will take and who gets what. (Hint, hint.)

But you have been spared a whole sermon on last wills and testaments due to an experience I had on Thursday which was, quite truly, life affecting. It really wasn't supposed to be. It was a lunch of the British Chamber of Commerce: hardly one of the most devout of groups, (despite the participation of several of our most devout church members.) But the speaker on this occasion was Dame Anita Roddick: the founder and director of the phenomenon known as The Body Shop.

Those who are not familiar with this phenomenon should know that there is a lot going on behind the Body Shop boutiques you see in the best malls. The products are one thing, but the way they are produced, marketed and sold shows a rare combination of business know-how and a crusader's sense of fighting for the rights of workers, for the safety of the environment and, if I may be dramatic, for the soul of the world.

All that Dame Anita did was to talk about what she and her organization are doing. And all that did was to knock some of us back on our heels to hear about how as simple an idea as running a company on humane and moral principles can, despite sin and greed and multi-nationals, be a success. This was no "get rich quick" scheme or sales campaign using vapid "politically correct" phraseology about fair trade and workers' rights. Instead, we heard a rather blunt and plain-spoken woman with a lot of chutzpah, tell us about how a purveyor of skin cream and upscale cosmetics has built schools, saved orphans and given women hope for a meaningful life all over the world. And it has done this quite simply by being human in the best and deepest sense of that word and running her business with the bottom line not of more value on the stock market, but rather of doing the right thing for other human beings.

Dame Anita didn't tell us what to do. She simply told us what she had done, what was possible for her. She shared the good news of, as it's been called, "Capitalism with a Human Face." It's not that she hasn't made enemies or isn't ready to take on

those who abuse children, women and the poor in the factories of the world. (I for one will think twice before going into a Wal-Mart again!) But she was an evangelist, if you will, of a different way of doing business and a different way of looking at the world. I was deeply moved, and also rather shamed.

Why? Because I sat there in the New World Renaissance and looked at my own life and wondered how it will look when I come up for judgment. Now, I wasn't comparing myself with a successful and moral English businesswoman, but I was comparing myself to the standards set by my own religion, by my own Lord Jesus Christ. What had I done to make the world a better place? What principles had run my career and what difference has it made in a fallen and sinful world?

Are you surprised to learn that a priest might say such things? No one who has had anything to do with church politics and administration should be, because the church is a kind of business, too, and the mouth service we pay to the ideas of a better, holier humanity can ring just as false as corporations that paint themselves green while they destroy the rain forests or sell innutritious milk to Third World mothers. Only, perhaps the church runs a higher risk of damnation because it claims that its standards are so much higher.

So the experience of last Thursday, coming as it did at the beginning of Advent, gave me a whole new way of looking at the Last Things. And perhaps it can for you, too.

Many people are doing things to help the world and even our local corner of it. Some have been recognized and decorated for it, many have not. But the simple fact remains that not enough has been done. Certainly not enough has been done given the potential that well-meaning, educated and courageous human beings should be capable of.

In today's epistle lesson, Paul writes to his friends in Rome that "our salvation is nearer than we first believed." That doesn't just mean that each Christian is closer to death every day- it's not just that personal. Paul is thinking about salvation in the sense of the consummation at the end of history that he thought was going to

happen very, very soon. However wrong he proved to be, the fact remains that the Christian must always live as though the end of the world were just around the corner, and in the certainty that the New Heaven and the New Earth that will result are already affecting the way we do business here and now. The issue may begin our personal souls, our relationship to God and His Son Jesus Christ, but it mustn't stay there if we are to be true to Christ. It's also how we have worked together to make things different: what we have done to reconcile arguments, encourage young people, love our families and friends and look beyond our own, safe walls to see a world outside that needs our help...yes, OUR help, not somebody we hire to worry about it for us.

Can that be true of each person here? I think it is. Can that be true for a church? It's got to be or this building and my job are absolutely pointless, or worse. But the good news of this Advent sermon is that, thanks be to God, it's not too late, yet, to say to God, "Alright. Let me do my part. Show me the way." This is the first day of the new Church Year. A new beginning. Or it can be.