

Sermon about 1 Cor 4, 1-5 on 3rd Advent 2021 in Brussels (IV)

Greeting: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

Bible: (1) This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. (3) But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. (4) For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. (5) Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, who has caused Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may hear, read, learn, and inwardly digest them, that through the comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which You have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon: *Opening – Time of secrets:* Advent, that is the time of secrecy and secrets. Advent is the time of planning and preparation, secret errands, and storage in hiding places. It is the time of surprises. - In my childhood, at home, when you tried to go into the study room, it was always said with a twinkle in the eye, "You won't get for Christmas what you saw beforehand."

Planning, errand, safekeeping - mystery. Our Advent and Christmas traditions are no accident. Already in one of the old, traditional liturgical hymns for the Christmas Mass it says "O Magnum Mysterium" - "O Great Mystery" - And of

course this does not mean a normal Christmas present. It is about another secret, long ago, carefully planned and decided before the times, prepared and well hidden, but ready for the great day and in any case suitable for the recipient. Where does it come from? From God in heaven.

1. Part – The fourfold mystery: But what is it? We know. Because we live after the one Christmas. At least we can have an idea. It is our Lord Jesus Christ. The Almighty, Eternal God becomes man in Jesus Christ in this time and world so that we humans can once again have access to God. Thus, the path back to paradise is open again.

But it is striking that the Apostle Paul speaks not only of *a* mystery, but of "myster^{ies}", in the plural. Obviously, it or them is complex, multiple, not simple. The "Legenda aurea", the "Golden Legends", one of the best known and most important books of the Middle Ages, which describes the feasts and saints' commemorations of the church year, explains the four Sundays of Advent in this way. There, in accordance with our Creed, it says: "The mystery is that our Lord first came to us in humanity, secondly that he came with grace into the heart of man, thirdly that he came to us in death, and fourthly that he will come again at the Last Day".¹

2. Part – Mystery remains: But a mystery that has been communicated is no longer a mystery. And how can a mystery be "administered", as Paul sees it as a task for himself? And why is it a mystery at all? The word that the Apostle Paul uses here for "steward" means someone "who makes the best of something", to serve the cause, to advance it. That is why it is secondary what others think and say of him. It doesn't matter how the world thinks Advent and Christmas should be celebrated. It doesn't matter at all how the world looks at us

¹ Vgl. Legende aurea des Jacobus de Voragine. Zitiert nach GPM #1/76. Göttingen 2021. Seite 30.

Christians, even if it makes jokes, perhaps also sets hurdles and speaks vituperations, perhaps even does persecutions. The only thing that counts for us Christians is to preserve, promote and spread the mystery of life, the mystery of Jesus Christ, and to keep our eyes looking forward. Forward to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ for the fulfilment of the last part of the great mystery: the final redemption. That is what counts. The return of the Lord; the Apostle Paul uses the Greek word "parouisa" for this - translated in Latin: Advent.

Advent is much more than waiting for Christmas. Advent is the prospect of the coming Lord of heaven and earth: Jesus Christ. It is a looking up to heaven. An uplifting. A breathing up.

3. Part – No full knowledge but full faith: But the apostle still speaks of a mystery. Firstly, we have seen that Jesus was indeed born into the world and also entered our hearts with the Holy Spirit in faith, and that he also went to death with and for us. But the fourth and final part is still to come. And despite all our forebodings, we do not know what it will be like when Jesus Christ returns. So it really is and remains a mystery. We also know the Church, we hear the Word and celebrate the sacraments. But do we fully understand all this? I would be very careful if someone claimed to understand all this. How does faith work, how does our Lord come into the sacrament? I do not know. It is certainly not in my power, but in the hands of the Almighty who works everything. It is and remains a mystery like God himself. The comforting thing for us is that we don't have to know and understand everything either.

This is precisely the reason for one division between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. The Roman Church thinks it can explain with a philosophical model of thought how our Lord Jesus Christ is present in the

elements of the sacrament of the altar and prescribes this model as "necessary to believe for salvation". Martin Luther rejected this as hypothetical sophistry. The Holy Sacrament of the Altar is also a mystery which must be seized by faith. We cannot fathom it. And even if we pastors introduce others to the mystery of faith, we have not fully fathomed it ourselves. Even the Church Father Cyril of Jerusalem, a contemporary of St. Nicholas, called his ecclesiastical teaching "mystagogy", introduction to the mystery. It is not an *explanation* or even a *revelation*, but an *introduction to the mystery*. The effects of faith are revealed: people find together, people find hope, forgiveness is practised, charity is lived and so on, but the cause remains in mystery. Faith in the Advent of the Lord cannot be explained.

Aim – God comes to present me with salvation: The message of Advent and Christmas is that God comes. He comes into the limitations and contradictions of human life. This event culminates in the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation. Is this really to be understood? Do I have to understand it? No. It is enough to wait for the explanation at the final Advent. At Christmas, it is enough to celebrate, to enjoy, to warm ourselves with what has been revealed. But Christmas is not exhausted by that. Advent also means being curious about the secret that is still waiting for me in a well-kept place and that will certainly suit me, because the one who wants to give it to me knows me very well.

Blessing: And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.