

Friends at Court.

GLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR.

(Written for the N.Z. TABLET.)

December	17, Sunday.—Third in Advent.
"	18, Monday.—Expectation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
"	19, Tuesday.—St. Urban, Pope and Martyr.
"	20, Wednesday.—Quat. Tense.
"	21, Thursday.—St. Thomas, Apostle.
"	22, Friday.—Quat. Tense, St. Deusdedit, Pope and Confessor.
"	23, Saturday.—Quat. Tense, St. Columbanus, Abbot.

FEAST OF THE EXPECTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

The Feast of the Expectation has been instituted by the Church to commemorate the longing desires and fervent aspirations with which the Immaculate Virgin greeted the near approach of that happy day when she was to bring into the world the long expected Messiah, whose coming to redeem mankind had been the continual object of her sighs and prayers. Yet a few short days and she would hold in her arms the Incarnate God, worship Him on bended knee wrap him in swaddling clothes, feed him from her virginal breast and pour forth into His Sacred Heart the most ardent affections of praise, thanksgiving and love! For now the time appointed by the Divine Decree was accomplished, and the Great Mystery hidden under veils and figures from the beginning of the world was about to be revealed to the astonished eyes of angels and of men.

During four thousand years had the earth groaned under the dominion of Satan, while kings, patriarchs, and prophets had looked eagerly forward for the coming of the promised Redeemer who was to break the fetters with which mankind was bound, and restore men to the liberty of sons of God.

The four weeks of Advent are intended by the Church to recall to our minds that anxious time of expectation. Meanwhile the promise made by God to our first parents, that the Seed of the woman should crush the serpent's head, was carefully treasured up and handed down from father to son through succeeding generations.

As time went on the promise was renewed to King David, of whose family it was declared that the Redeemer was to be born. Many of the psalms of the royal prophet are full of ardent aspirations after the coming of the Saviour, who was to destroy the power of hell and re-establish the kingdom of God in the hearts of men. It was also permitted him to behold in the far-off future the accomplishment of the promises of God by the incarnation, passion, and death of our Lord. These sacred mysteries he has described to us with a minuteness which reads to us rather like a record of the past than a prediction of the distant future. The same may be said of the writings of some of the other prophets, who were sent by God to prepare the minds and hearts of men for the coming of His Son.

Conspicuous among these was Isaiah, who, after announcing that the Redeemer would be born of a Virgin, relates in detail many circumstances regarding His passion and the establishment of His Church. In his ardent longing for the speedy coming of the Incarnate God he cries out, 'Drop down dew ye heavens from above, and let the clouds rain the just; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour.' The same eager desire of the prophet Daniel for the coming of the Messiah brought down from heaven the great Archangel Gabriel, who revealed to him the precise time when the Saviour should be born. Thus did the saints of old continually aspire after the coming of the Son of God, whom, however, they were not permitted to behold with the eyes of the flesh.

Wherefore our Blessed Lord reminded His apostles of the special privilege which they themselves enjoyed in beholding and conversing with Him during His mortal life. 'Blessed,' said he, 'are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For amen I say to you, many prophets and just men have desired to see the things that you see and have not seen them, and to hear the things that you hear and have not heard them.'

Let us, too, pour out our hearts in gratitude to God that we have been made partakers of the abundant graces which are the fruits of our Lord's incarnation, preparing ourselves at the same time by fervent desires and loving aspirations, in union with the Immaculate Virgin, to celebrate in the spirit of the Church the coming birthday of the sweet Infant Jesus.

ST. THOMAS, APOSTLE.

St. Thomas was one of the fishermen on the Lake of Galilee whom our Lord called to be His apostle. There are only three incidents related of him in the Gospel, but these are enough to make his character more familiar to us than that of any other except St. Peter and Paul.

By nature slow to believe, too apt to see difficulties, and to look at the dark side of things, he had withal a most sympathetic, loving, and courageous heart. Once when Jesus spoke of the mansions in His Father's house St. Thomas in his simplicity asked: 'Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?' When Jesus turned to go towards Bethany to the grave of Lazarus, the desponding apostle at once feared the worst for his beloved Lord, yet cried out bravely to the rest, 'Let us also go and die with Him.'

After the Resurrection incredulity again prevailed, and whilst the wounds of the crucifixion were imprinted vividly on his affectionate mind, he would not credit the report that Christ had indeed risen. But the actual sight of the pierced hands and side and the gentle rebuke of his Saviour went home at once to his generous heart. Unbelief was gone for ever, and his faith and ours has ever triumphed in the joyous utterance into which he broke: 'My Lord and my God!'

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