

Advent II Sermon 1 by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

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A few years back, I received one of those very special gifts which I like to call “coercive” Christmas presents. You know the kind I’m sure, because we all get them, and some of us give them. For example, a Heart-Smart cookbook instead of a pound of chocolates, or a set of Nicotine Patches instead of a box of cigars. When I was a Rock and Roll teenager, one of my brothers was fond of giving me tapes of classical music. Now let me be clear that I am not promoting this kind of gift-giving, though I am sure we will all get a toothbrush in my house this year.

So one Christmas morning, I found a Rowing Machine had been bought for me. It came with all kinds of small pieces to be assembled, along with instructions in seven languages. I stood back, as the members of the family who knew a Robinson from

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a flat head, put the machine together. It worked well for six months, until one day the arm popped, the metal twisted, nuts let go, and it fell into three pieces. At that stage, I went to the manual, and there were the instructions, still in their plastic wrapper, unopened.

Today, in the name of the Church, I am inviting you to have a look at the manual, to open up the instructions and to read them, before everything falls apart. But let's be honest, it is usually only once we have come face to face with the limits of our own knowledge and abilities and expertise, that we will seek advice. So in life, it is often only once things have fallen apart, that we are open to God's Word. The Bible is the manual, the handbook of life, and it contains in it not only the instructions for life, but also the words of eternal life.

Now your owner's manual has these instructions, but it also contains in it your Guarantee. And the Sacred Scriptures

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likewise have this Warranty, they bring us this assurance, this written guarantee, for they are the written Testament or Covenant of God. So St. Paul tells us this morning that the Bible has been written for our learning, it is a book of instruction, and it is the record of the promise or guarantee of God.

We call the Sacred Scriptures the Word of God written, the writings of the Old and New Testament, which reminds us that they point to, and must always be understood in their witness to, Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, in whose blood is the eternal Covenant or Testament.

When the monarch is crowned, a Bible is given. When Elizabeth our Queen was crowned, she was handed a Bible with these words: “This Book is the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the royal Law; these are the lively oracles of God.” I remind you of those words, that we

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might reconsider how we value the Scriptures. Our forbears in the faith regarded them as more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey. But I also mention the gift of a Bible to the new Monarch, for the gift of a Bible has also been traditional for the newly baptized. That is to give them the written guarantee of their Father's love, and of salvation through Jesus Christ, and the divine instructions on how to live the new life.

Baptism is the beginning, a new beginning, a being born again by water and the Spirit. But good beginnings are not enough. We mark at baptism the beginning of Christian life, and we hear today from Jesus about the end of the world. When Christ comes again to judge, there will be fear and dread, but there will also be an expectant - even joyful - looking up. For some, it will be distress; for others, redemption. And the difference is this: some will know him only as Judge, as

Revelation puts it, they shall see him which pierced him and

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they shall wail. But others know him, the Judge, as their Saviour, and the one they sought to follow.

The theme of today is hope, and hope is what we in our society, in our homes and on our streets, in our schools and in our jails, need. But Christian hope is not blind optimism, it is not the effect of rosy colored glasses. It is, in the midst of troubles and calamities, to trust in God, and to look for redemption. It is like Abraham, to hope against hope, and to trust God.

My prayer for you in your journey through this life is this: The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.