

Advent.

And now begins another Ecclesiastical Year.

Four thousand years are summed up in the next four weeks. The aspirations and longings of mankind, from the Fall of Adam to the preaching of John the Baptist (four thousand years, according to the so-called "Biblical chronology") are reviewed in the liturgy of the next four weeks. The Church puts on sackcloth and ashes -- the violet vestments -- she omits from Gloria from the Mass, she omits the name of the Saviour from the usual prayer-endings, her invocations are from the lips of the ancient Prophets, especially Isaias, "the Evangelist of the Old Testament", whose descriptions of the life and the qualities of the Redeemer to come are so detailed and accurate.

Penance ! Penance ! Penance ! That was the warning of the Prophets. God sent them to warn the people whose heart was grown gross. "Bring forth fruits worthy of penance." St. John the Baptist warned in the same key; and he added: "Now is the axe laid to the root of the tree, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruits shall be cut down and cast into the fire." Sin is the only evil in the world, and penance is the only cure for sin. "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish." With these words Our Lord confirmed the preaching of the Prophets and of John. "Penitence ! Penitence ! Penitence !" A heavenly messenger brought this warning to us again only a few years ago, when, in 1858, Our Lady spoke to Bernadette at Lourdes.

Self-denial is the key-note of the Advent season. Pray we must, of course. "Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant Justum." "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One." This is the prayer of the Church, and we make it our own. And the Church does not deny us the Mass and the Sacraments while we await the coming of the Just One. But self-denial curbs the flesh, drives out love of the world, purges inordinate inclinations, gives the spirit a chance to soar. Self-denial brings us to the crib in an understanding spirit.

Suppose you turn that self-denial to the benefit of the "butt-ends of humanity" in the South Sea Islands who suffer from the most dreadful scourge known to man, leprosy. A short time ago Father Hudson received a letter from one of the nuns who care for the lepers at Makogai. In it she says: "Last month a steamer from the Cook Islands came in with 32 lepers, almost all children, young girls and women. The youngest child was a little girl of five years. She did not know any of the other patients, poor little thing! There were nine boys under ten years, and five girls between seven and ten years. I am used to see miseries and I have seen many a sad incident in my sixteen years amongst the lepers, but I do not remember a sadder one than the arrival of these children. I thought of the mothers of these children as well as the children themselves, and I had to run to a lonely place where I could let my tears come free."

Last year you raised nearly five hundred dollars for the benefit of this poor leper colony, and the expressions of gratitude from the poor Sisters and their patients must surely have burned your ears. Every letter that comes from them brings renewed assurances of prayers, and new incidents of the high spirituality of these "human stumps" whose prayers must be very acceptable to God. When they can accept their fate with cheerful resignation we can certainly never complain that God has not been good to us.

For the love of God cut out frivolity now and make a good Advent. You have danced to your heart's content this fall; amusement has stunted your minds so that the marks on the last examinations appear to be the worst ever made at Notre Dame. Take your amusement money and give to the lepers (or to any other good cause). Pull in your belt. Advent is upon us.