Dimanche II Advent 2014

“Stir up, O Lord, our hearts”—Collect

The Advent Collects are some of the most ancient prayers in the entire Roman liturgy. While almost nothing is known for certain about the Roman liturgy of the first five centuries, the Advent Collects all appear in the eighth century Old Gelasian Sacramentary. This ancient manuscript is itself thought to be a copy of a lost manuscript having its origin towards the close of the 5th century, during the reign of Pope Gelasius I (r. 492-496). Pope St. Gregory the Great (r. 590-604) rearranged the order of the Collects towards the close of the 6th century, and so they stood until the 20th century. Those who attend the Ordinary Form of the Roman rite will hear today’s Collect on Thursday.

Today’s Collect reads: “Stir up, O Lord, our hearts, to prepare the way for thine Only-Begotten Son: that through His Advent, we may merit to serve thee with purified minds.” This one short prayer beautifully expresses “the reason for the season”: The Lord is coming soon, but we are not yet ready to meet Him. Just as we make haste to clean and adorn our homes to receive an honored and beloved guest, so too must we make haste during these short weeks to clean and adorn our hearts to receive the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

If we use these weeks to make a good confession, to reach out to those who are lonely or in need, to refrain from feasting during this penitential season, then we will surely experience in a deeper way the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy from today’s Introit: “Le Seigneur fera éclater la majesté de sa voix dans le joie des vos coeurs” (Is. 30, 30).