

Preparing for His Coming: The Divine Renovation Project

If Advent is about preparing for Christ's coming, then St. Paul's words in Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11 are the blueprint for the job. The apostle assures us that *"the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 1:6). It's comforting to know God is doing the heavy lifting—but don't mistake this for a free ride. As St. Augustine reminds us, *"God created us without us, but He will not save us without us."*

This passage invites us to think of our souls as divine renovation projects. Imagine yourself as a spiritual "fixer-upper." When Christ knocked on your door, you opened it, thinking He'd patch up a few cracks. Instead, He walked in with blueprints and said, "We're gutting the whole thing." This is why St. Paul prays that our *"love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment"* (Philippians 1:9). Renovations require discernment—otherwise, we end up wallpapering over mold or building a deck on sinking sand.

Step 1: Trust the Architect

St. Paul begins by reminding the Philippians to trust in God's plan: *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion"* (1:6). Origen interprets this as God's unwavering commitment to our sanctification. He says, *"As the potter takes a shapeless lump of clay and forms it into a useful vessel, so God is constantly forming us, if only we allow Him."*

But here's the catch: we often resist. We doubt the Architect's vision because it involves tearing down walls we've grown comfortable with. That grudge we've held for years? "It's structural," we argue. The bad habit we know needs to go? "It's part of the charm!" Yet, Christ insists on preparing us for His coming, and He won't settle for a quick paint job.

Step 2: Learn the Difference Between DIY and Divine Grace

Now, some of us are spiritual DIY enthusiasts. We think we can do it all ourselves—impress God with our prayer routines or heroic fasting. But St. Paul reminds us that it is *"God who began the good work"* (1:6), not us. St. John Chrysostom elaborates: *"Even the inclination to do good comes from the Lord; it is He who plants the seed in our hearts."*

This doesn't mean we sit back and binge-watch spiritual Netflix. No, we cooperate with grace. It's a partnership. God hands us the tools, but we have to pick them up. Think of it this way: God provides the hammer, but we're the ones who have to swing it.

Step 3: Embrace the Mess

Renovation is messy—so is Advent. St. Paul's prayer that we become *"pure and blameless for the day of Christ"* (1:10) might sound overwhelming. But don't let perfectionism paralyze you. St. Ambrose offers a perspective that might ease the pressure: *"It is not the beginning of grace that perfects us, but perseverance in it."*

So, yes, your soul may still look like a construction zone by Christmas. That's okay. The important thing is that the scaffolding is up, and the work is ongoing.

Step 4: Prepare with Joy

St. Paul's tone is one of joy and thanksgiving. He writes, *"I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace"* (1:7). Notice he doesn't write, "I'm frustrated with you because you're taking forever to grow in holiness." The Church Fathers remind us that God is patient with us—infinately so. St. Basil the Great once said, *"The grace of God is not exhausted by our failures but is renewed every day."*

This should free us from the anxiety of "getting it all right." God's work in us is a marathon, not a sprint. Advent isn't about finishing the race—it's about lacing up your running shoes and starting to jog.

A Joyful Warning

One danger, though, is thinking, "God will finish the work, so I don't need to do much." This mindset is like living in a house where half the roof is missing and saying, "It's fine; it's only a little rain." If we neglect prayer, sacraments, and works of charity, we delay the renovation process. St. Jerome cautions us: *"Neglect of small virtues leads to great vices."*

Let Christ Be Your Foreman

In this Advent season, let's hand Christ the reins of our renovation project. It won't be easy. There will be days when you want to fire Him because His plans seem too ambitious. But remember St. Paul's assurance: *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."*

And when it feels overwhelming, keep a sense of humor. After all, every saint was once a "fixer-upper." St. Teresa of Ávila famously quipped, *"If this is how You treat Your friends, no wonder You have so few!"* Even she knew the divine renovation process comes with its share of challenges—but also unimaginable rewards.

So, get to work this Advent. Clear out the clutter, swing the hammer, and let God's grace do the heavy lifting. And when Christ comes, you won't just have a house; you'll have a home fit for the King of Kings.