

Scripture Study

First Sunday of Advent – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Isaiah 2:1-5

(Ps 122:1-9)

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

Overview of the Gospel:

- Advent is a time for looking both backward and forward. We look backward as we prepare to celebrate the historical birth of Jesus of Nazareth at Christmas.
- This Sunday's reading is taken from Jesus' "Olivet Discourse," so called because he delivered it on the Mount of Olives, just outside of Jerusalem in view of the city and Temple walls.
- At the beginning of this chapter his disciples had asked him two questions in response to his prediction of the Temple's destruction: "When will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming?" (verses 2-3) Jesus spends verses 4 through 35 answering the first question using symbolic (or *apocalyptic*) language. He then indirectly answers their second question.
- In speaking about his Second Coming, Jesus remains vague about the precise timing. His emphasis instead is the crucial necessity of Christians to always be ready to meet him whenever he comes—either at the end of time or for each of us at the end of our lives.
- This is the purpose of the Advent season: that we may strive to "stay awake" (verse 42), for we "do not know" (verses 39, 42), and thus "also must be prepared" (verse 44) to meet Our Lord at anytime.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading from Isaiah, in what ways is access to the "mountain of the Lord's house" different than what it was in times past?
- In the 2nd Reading, what condition is St. Paul calling his readers *from*? What actions is he calling his readers *to*? How prepared are you to answer this call?
- In what ways is the Flood, which Jesus references, like the Second Coming of Christ?
- What does it mean, practically speaking, to be ready for Jesus' return if we do not know when he will come?
- How would you explain the end times and the Second Coming to a non-Catholic (see CCC 674-675)?
- Over what in this world has God given you stewardship? How would God evaluate the job you are doing? Would he find you faithful?
- How does the admonition of Jesus to be watchful apply to how you live your life? How might your surroundings be distracting you? How do you need to prepare for the Lord's coming—during this Advent season and beyond?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 474, 672-673, 2849

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father's house. We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart which means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which, therefore, is expressed in sacrifice and self-giving. We return to our Father's house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Jesus Christ again and become His brothers, members of God's family. –St. Josemaria Escriva

“As it was in the Days of Noah...”

Gospel Reading: *Matthew 24:37-44*

Meditation: Do you know what it feels like when you expect a friend to come whom you haven't seen for some time, and he or she delays? Or when you get excited because you are anticipating some important or life-changing event to take place, and you wake up in the morning with that thought on your mind? The Lord Jesus expects us to watch in great anticipation for the most important event of all – his return in glory at the end of time! The prophets foretold the coming of the Lord when *he shall judge between the nations and decide for many peoples* (Isaiah 2:5). The Advent season reminds us that we are living in the end times. The end times begins with the first coming of Christ (his Incarnation which we celebrate at Christmas) and culminates in his final return on the Day of Judgment. Jesus spoke of his return in glory at the end of time as a for certain fact. Jesus' audience understood the title, *Son of Man*, as referring to the Messianic prophecy of the Anointed King who comes to establish an everlasting kingdom over the earth (see Daniel 7:13). While the second coming is for certain, the time is unknown. The Lord's judgment comes swiftly and often unexpectedly. Jesus warns his listeners to not be caught off guard when that day arrives. It will surely come in God's good time! Do you earnestly pray for God's kingdom to come – here and now!

What does Jesus mean when he says that one will be taken and another left? Having the right friends, even those who are very close to God, will not guarantee our entry into heaven. We can live and work with godly Christians, but no matter how close they may be to God, they



cannot win a place for us in heaven. God offers each of us a personal invitation to accept his kingdom or to reject it. There is really no middle ground. We are either for God or against him, for his kingdom of righteousness or against it. The choice is ours. And God's grace is available to those who are willing to believe in God and obey his word.

God knows our struggles and challenges well, and he gives grace and help wherever we need it. But there is one excuse that God will not accept from us – that is trying to pass off personal responsibility for our lives and for our decisions to someone else. God's judges each of us individually according to how we have responded to his gracious invitation to live for his kingdom. No one can discharge his or her duty by proxy or association. The good news is that God is merciful and he gives grace to turn away from sin and the help we need to follow his way of holiness. God's judgment is good news for those who are ready to meet the Lord when he returns in his glory. He gives us fresh hope each day so we can keep our eyes on eternal reward waiting for us. What is that reward we long for? It is God himself, the source of all beauty, truth and goodness, and the fullness of love and life that never ends.

In every age God issues his warning as a sign of mercy to those who will heed it. The people in Noah's time ignored the Lord's warning of

judgment. They missed the boat, literally! Whose boat are you taking – the world's boat to false success and fleeting happiness or God's boat to unending peace and fellowship with him in heaven? Those whose hope is firmly anchored in heaven will not be disappointed when God's judgment comes. They rejoice even now that they will see the Lord in his glory! Is your hope firmly placed in God and in his kingdom of righteousness and peace?

Jesus concludes his warning with a parable about a robbery that could have been stopped. If you knew that a thief wanted to steal your inheritance, wouldn't you guard it with your life? How foolish to leave our treasure unguarded where the thief can easily steal. God promises each of us an inheritance and reward which he calls a "treasure beyond measure" (see the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price in Matthew 13:44-46). What is this treasure of immeasurable value? It is the Lord himself who is our treasure, and the kingdom he offers us is a kingdom of true and lasting peace, joy, and righteousness. The Lord offers us a personal relationship with him as his sons and daughters and the promise of eternal life as well. This invaluable and eternal treasure is more secure and it lasts longer than any earthly treasure could possibly last. But it's possible that we can lose our treasure and inheritance if we allow sin or Satan to rob us of faith and hope in God. Do you keep your sight on the heavenly treasure which awaits you?

"Lord Jesus Christ, you are my hope and salvation. Help me to never lose sight of the goal of heaven and give me fresh joy and zeal to live each day for your kingdom."

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