

Scripture Study

First Sunday of Advent – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

(Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19)

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

Overview of the Gospel:

- This first Sunday of Advent's Gospel reading is taken from the end of Mark's version of the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:1ff; see also Matthew 24:4-14 and Luke 21:8-19), delivered on the Mount of Olives outside of Jerusalem shortly before his Passion.
- The discourse itself was precipitated by a question from his disciples about the destruction of the temple (verse 4), which Jesus had just predicted (verse 2). For the Jews, the end of the temple was akin to the end of the world; the end of life as they knew it.
- Jesus' discourse has elements of both events, plus predictions of the persecution to come (verse 9-13; Acts 4:5ff, 6:12ff; Matthew 5:10-11; Romans 8:18), of false prophets (verse 21-22), and of the warning signs of the time. The end of the temple and the end of time can also be related to the end of each person's life when he or she will be judged.
- At the same time, Jesus makes it clear that the exact timing of each of these events is unknown (verse 32). This takes us to this Sunday's Gospel passage.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, what situation does Isaiah find God's people in? How does that compare to the God's people today? What is he calling on God to do? For what should we be asking God to do in our day? In the world? In the Church? In our own lives?
- In the 2nd Reading, what kinds of gifts has God given to all believers by his grace? To what end are we given these gifts? How are you using the gifts God has given you?
- In the Gospel reading, what are the three levels of Jesus' command to be watchful?
- What is the most exciting thing to you about the Second Coming? The most distressing? What questions would you like to ask Jesus about it?
- Why do you think the Lord keeps secret the exact time of his Second Coming? What would be the advantages of knowing? The disadvantages?
- How has the social or religious environment worsened in ways that you may have not noticed? How have you been affected by the changes? What need of watchfulness to you see?
- Specifically, how can you fulfill verses 35-37: "Be watchful! Be alert...Watch!"?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 672, 2848—2849

Closing prayer

For a person to go straight along the road, he must have some knowledge of the end--just as an archer will not shoot an arrow straight unless he first sees the target ... This is particularly necessary if the road is hard and rough, the going heavy, and the end delightful. --St. Thomas Aquinas

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"What I say to you I say to all: Watch"

Gospel reading: *Mk 13:33-37*

Meditation: Do you know what it feels like when you expect a friend to come whom you haven't seen for some time, and that person delays? Or when you get excited because you are anticipating some important event to take place, and you wake up in the morning with that thought on your mind? Jesus' parable about the long-expected return of the Master to his household brings this point home. Wealthy landowners often left their estates in the hands of their trusty servants and stewards. This gave them freedom to travel, trade, and expand their business ventures. They expected loyalty and hard work from their servants and rewarded them accordingly. Dutiful servants would eagerly anticipate their master's return by keeping the house and estate in good order. Jesus doesn't tell us in his parable whether the servants were ready to receive the unexpected return of their master. Were these servants excited or anxious about their master's return? The watchful servants, no doubt, looked forward to the future because they knew their master would be pleased and would reward them for their vigilance and hard work. Disaster and reprisal, however, awaited those who were unprepared because of carelessness or laziness.

When we expect some very important event to happen, we wait for it with excited anticipation. 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!

The prophet Isaiah tells us that God will surely reward those who wait for his visitation: "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who works for those who wait for him" (Isaiah 64:4). Our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, entrusts us with his gifts and grace and he expects to be ready for action and prepared for the future. Our call is not only believe, but to watch; not only to love, but to watch; not only to obey, but to watch! What are we to watch for? The greatest event to come – the return of our Master and Lord

Jesus Christ when he comes again in glory at the end of the age. The kind of watching our Lord has in mind is not a passive "wait and see what happens" approach to life. The Lord urges us to vigilance and to active prayer that his "kingdom may come" and his "will be done on earth as it is in heaven". We are not only to watch *for* Christ, but also to watch *with* Christ. The Lord wants us to have our hearts and minds fixed on him and his word. He wants us to be ready for his action and grace in our lives and in our world. Those who "wait" for the Lord will not be disappointed. He will surely come with his grace and saving help. Do you watch for the Lord's action in your life with expectant faith and with joyful hope?

The season of Advent is a time for rousing our minds and hearts for the Lord's coming. As his servants we watch for his will – continually seeking him; we watch for his word and his power – that he may act now to save and to deliver; and we watch for his visitation – he will surely come again! Servants of the Lord rouse yourselves! Be vigilant, be alert, be "watchmen" for the Lord pointing the way for his coming. Are you ready to meet the Lord?

"Lord Jesus, awaken my heart and mind to receive your word and to prepare for your coming again. Free me from complacency, from the grip of sin and worldliness, and from attachments to things which pass away. May I always be eager to receive your word and be ready to meet you when you come again."

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